THE SHORT STORY MAGAZINE

ARGOSY

AUGUST, 1960

Price in SOUTH AFRICA
AUSTRALIA and NEW ZEALAND
TWO SHILLINGS
AND SIXPENCE

SEAN O'FAOLAIN

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM

GERALD KERSH

BRIAN CLEEVE

J. H. WILLIAMS

JON CLEARY

JOAN AIKEN

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ARGOSY

for

EVERYONE

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Your welcome will be doubled
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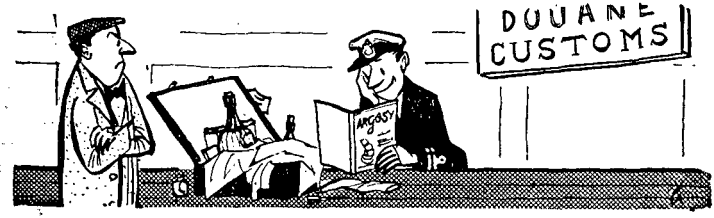

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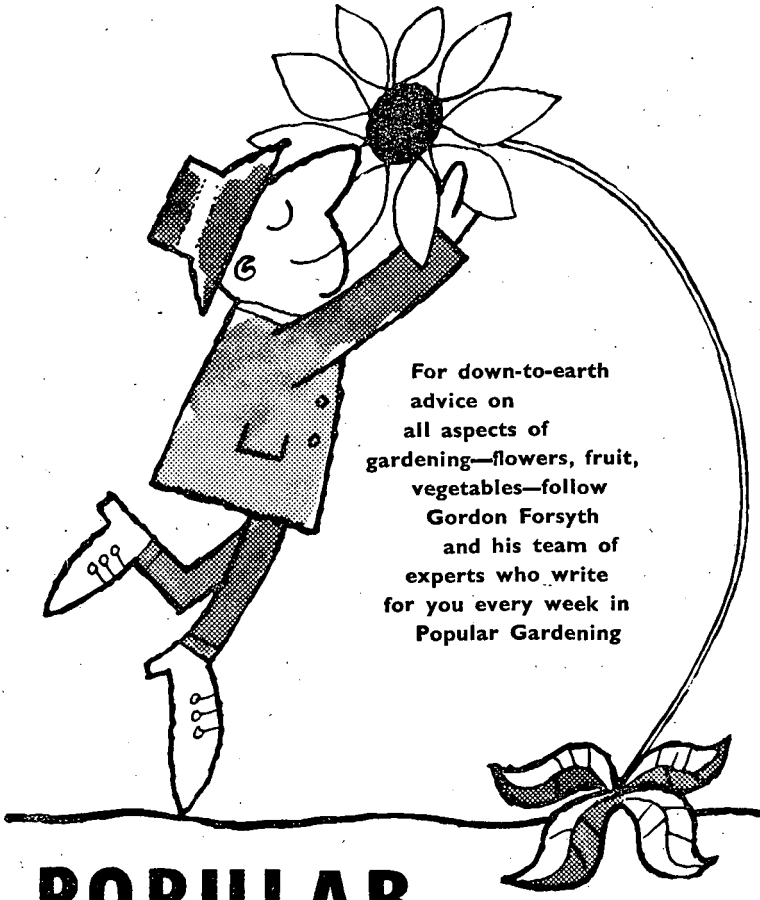

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ARGOSY

A Fleetway magazine

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Log Book

AT breakfast recently—never our strongest time—we received an advertising brochure whose title, ringed in a pleasing but ominous garland of wasps, larvae, and beetles, was *Pest and Disease Control.*

Since a persistent, evil ticking has lately been audible in the room where we work, and exhaustive search has failed to reveal a time-bomb—the clock stopped on the first Wednesday of last month—we came to the uneasy conclusion that we might be infested by a Death Watch Beetle (Where found: woodwork) and we began to read the pamphlet with care.

It was not reassuring.

Even the alphabetical list of creatures likely to appear at any time in house or garden was fraught with doom. Ants, Aphids, Apple-Blossom Weevil, Black Spot (as tipped by Long John Silver no doubt,) Botrytis, Capsid, Caterpillars, Cutworms, Damping Off (we know exactly what that is, but had not expected it in this connection,) Leaf Miners (a kind of Robin Hood gang, one imagines, with green pit-clothes and glow-worm-like Davy Safety Lamps), Millepedes, Red Spider, Sawfly, Slugs, Snails, Thrips (this might be one of those curt Scottishisms like Thrums or baps that sound sinister but are *quite nice* really,) Wasps, Weeds (Where found: paths, the compilers of the pamphlet say, but we could tell them a thing or two,) Wireworm.

Fairly comprehensive, indeed to goodness. By the end of the list we were in a psychotic state, eyeing the room and what we could see of the garden warily, expecting advance warriors and marching armies to appear from every quarter.

The column headed "Where found," was pretty unnerving, too. About several pests it merely stated dolefully, "In garden and greenhouse," or "On many garden plants."

We were reminded of the early Silly Symphony in which poor

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Mickey frenziedly hoed and sprayed among mammoth munching beetles and huge hopping caterpillars who chewed down whole trees as soon as his back was turned. Is our garden on the brink of disintegration? While we sit here are Cutworms chewing off plants at soil level, Symphiles attacking roots of glasshouse (ours has no roots but presumably in well-conducted gardens they do,) while Millepedes (dark, snake-like, many legs) and Wasps (which both have an ominous blank in the Where Found column, no doubt because, like the Elusive Pimpernel, they are going to pop out where least expected) marshal themselves in larder and bathroom?

Brrrrrr!

Feeling in need of cheer and relaxation we turned to our other letters. One, from a large store, starting Dear Cookery Editor, took our fancy, since it was headed Dishes for the Hostess with Exotic Tastes, and seemed likely to be a pleasant distraction.

. . . Seasoned Bumble Bees from Japan in 3½ oz. tin. 3s. 6d.

Quail eggs from Japan. 1⅖ oz. 2s. 3d.

Zaza insects from Japan in 2 oz. tin. 3s. 6d.

No. *No!*

You won't find us at any exotic or beatnik parties for a long, long time. While the strains of jazz peal out and the Zaza insects merrily circulate, we're staying right at home. Not even the possibility of Wild Boar with Mushrooms in a 6 oz. container shall tempt us forth. We'll be in our peaceful workroom editing Argosy amid the homely ticking of the Death Watch Beetle.

There are no flies on this Argosy, however. Authors in our exotic summer galaxy are:

Sean O'Faolain, one of Ireland's most distinguished writers, who, so the story goes, began a long novel during World War II,

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became dissatisfied after four years' work on it, and decided to incinerate it in his garden bonfire. However, when a good many chapters had been demolished he came to one that he liked particularly and reprieved it. This chapter became the basis for his long story beginning on page 116. O'Faolain (you pronounce his name something like railin') was born sixty years ago, educated at the National University of Ireland and at Harvard, but mainly, he says, by good conversation. He has written many books: plays, short stories, and biographies. His collected short stories came out two years ago. He is Director of the Arts Council of Ireland and lives in County Dublin.

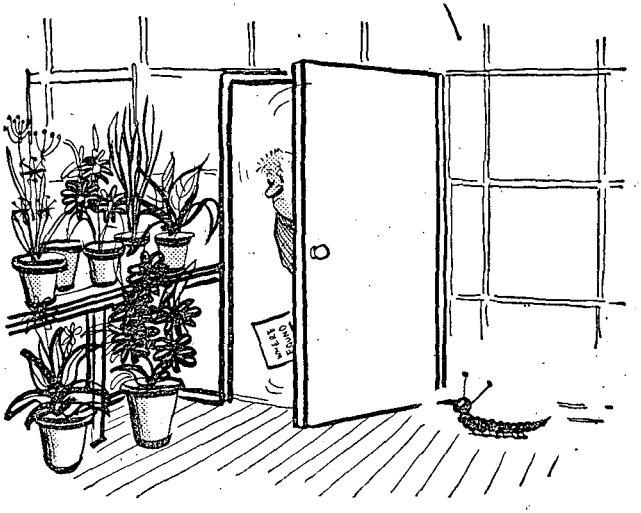
John Steinbeck needs no introduction to Argosy readers. This month we print another of his unexpected sidelights on army life from his book *Once There Was a War.*

Gerald Kersh has produced a disconcerting new slant on portrait photography, and **Brian Cleeve** a dish of apple sauce.

Jon Cleary, an excerpt from his book *North from Thursday* appears on page 70, is a 42-year-old Australian who has travelled all over the world with his wife and two small daughters in pursuit of colourful backgrounds for his books. At present he is in England working on a filmscript. He will shortly return to Australia to trek out the scheme of a novel on Outback pioneers.

Also one of **J. H. Williams'** (Elephant Bill's) last and most characteristic stories, to be included in *In Quest of a Mermaid.*

Horatio JOHN SILVER



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LAKE OF LEIKSAKAN

My travelling elephants knew—
not one of them would enter the water

BY J. H. WILLIAMS

"ELEPHANT BILL"

THERE are many lonely places in the Burmese jungles, but I never found one as lonely as the Lake of Leiksakan.

I came on it by chance when I was on trek with six travelling elephants. It was a small circular lake on the top of a ridge, with no inflow and no outflow—a great dewpond about three hundred yards across.

The water was crystal clear but it had a brackish taste. Round the edges grew all the grasses, weeds, and bulrushes of the jungle; and in a larger circle, about fifty yards from the rim, rose a dense forest wall made by huge trees entangled in masses of creepers.

Molly Mia, my Alsatian, found it for me. She had disappeared from my heels, following a game-track through fairly open jungle. After a few minutes I called her and she came to me wet-coated. She shook herself, showering my shorts and stockings, and then gave me a look inviting me to come and see.

We were well ahead of the elephants and my servant, Aung Net, and I had time to walk round the little lake before they caught us up. I was fascinated first by the surprise of finding the lake where it was and then by its atmosphere.

It was not just loneliness. Perhaps separation is a better word. It was, in some way I did not understand, a "special place." It was set apart.

We sat for a while on an old tree trunk, waiting for the elephants to catch us up. There were no grasses or bulrushes at the water's edge and we could see over the lake to the far side, and just by us was a patch of water-lilies in bloom. Their large flat leaves covered the surface of the water like floating green carpets.

"I wonder what men call this place," I said.

"Leiksakan," Aung Net said, and laughed. He often laughed, and though he was my servant for years I was never quite certain what his laughs meant. This one might have meant that it was a silly name or one so obvious that there could not be any other name

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possible to call it. In Burmese "leik" means "turtle," and "sakan" means "resting-place."

"Well, this time I'm the turtle, Aung Net," I said. "We're going to camp here tonight."

"M'kaung boo," he said. "No good." He pointed to the edge of the lake. "No animal drinks here. You've seen that. Not a track. No wild elephant, bison, bear, tiger, wild pig. Not even a wild cat."

I had noticed that and it was strange. But water was water. With the going good at the top of the ridge, why drop down to creek level and only have to climb the following day?

"We camp here," I repeated.

Soon we heard the sound of the different wooden bells of the travelling elephants running towards us like laughing water. The young tusker Po Sein, Firefly, appeared heading the Indian file; I shouted, "Yat like," and the oozie stopped and I led them to where I had been sitting with Aung Net.

I detected a certain lack of enthusiasm among the oozies about the camping site I had chosen. But I was not surprised. The jungle was so monotonous that anywhere which was the least bit strange was regarded as the habitation of a nat or local spirit. I resented these nats who staked out claims on all the most interesting places.

We camped on the edge of Leiksakan, and in the evening the magic of the lake was heightened by a mist which came pouring over the ridge in foamy cataracts. For a while it hovered over the lake as a fog, almost as light and dry as wood-smoke. It enveloped the crowns of the giant kanyin trees. Through it the evening light appeared to be magnified. The distant boles of trees appeared like black ghosts, intermingled with the white-grey and silver grasses near to.

This strange effect was repeated upside down on the still surface of the brackish lake.

The effect was so remarkable that, to Aung Net's surprise, I bent down with my back to it and observed it upside down between my legs. Then I sat down and made a watercolour of it. No one could dare to convey such delicacy in oils. I hoped I had caught it in watercolour.

There are moments—unfortunately only too seldom—when we know, This is something which I shall remember till the day I die. I had that feeling immediately I saw the Lake of Leiksakan. Perhaps it was merely that its loneliness chimed in with my own feelings. I had received no mail for weeks and more than anything I wanted the letters and newspapers which I knew were being brought to me by Po Loo, who had been following my trek.

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When the watercolour was dry, I put it into an envelope and addressed it to my mother. I would give it to Po Loo when he came. I wondered whether I was enough of an artist to convey to my mother, when she received it in Cornwall, any sense of how special and set apart this place was.

My travelling elephants knew. Not one of them had watered from the Lake of Leiksakan or even entered it. Their wood bells told me that they were off for water down in the creeks either side of the ridge.

But I didn't care. I felt, not happy, but perversely contented with this quiet lake, shunned by man and beast. There was usually some chatter from my servants, but this evening they were eerily quiet.

As the elephant bells receded, there was no noise, even when out of the mist a small flight of snow-white egrets glided in on the wing to settle, like homing ghosts, to roost on the islet which seemed to float on the centre of the lake.

I had chosen the lake as my camp because I felt its mood matched my own. But it outdid me. I had come here homesick, and wanting news. But now this lake had caught me and twisted this loneliness into something quite different. I would not have changed my place with anyone in the world. Molly Mia, whose companionship made the long jungle journeys tolerable, went away and curled up to sleep in my tent. But I did not mind.

The stillness of the lake—its separation—fascinated me. I was not frightened. But I felt set apart as the lake was set apart. There was a sense of numbness. The busy part of myself told me I ought to be doing something. But there was really nothing to do except—I can't say look at, that would be wrong—except to be with the lake, if you see what I mean.

I was disturbed by Aung Net bringing me food. But he did not chatter, as he sometimes did. The little he said was in an undertone, in deference it seemed to the spirit of Leiksakan.

Molly Mia was equally subdued. After Aung Net had gone away, I noticed that the Alsatian had left practically all her rice.

"If you're not going to eat it," I said to the dog, "I'm going to throw it to the fishes in the lake."

I picked up the dish and walked to the water's edge. The pressure-lamp hanging from the branch of a tree and the flames of the log fire near my tent shone on the water.

Molly Mia watched me lazily. "I mean it, really," I said. Then I made another attempt to coax her to eat, but she was not interested.

"All right," I said, and I flicked the contents of the bowl

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across the water. The grains of rice spread and broke the silence like pellets of gunshot falling into the lake.

Immediately Molly Mia, normally a bold dog, ran to my tent as if she was frightened. Yet this did not surprise me, because the stillness of the lake had been so deep that the noise of the falling rice was almost like an explosion. I turned and went back to the full light of my friendly lamp.

I looked around for something to read, but I had nothing in camp to interest me. All the papers I had from home were old. I knew their contents from cover to cover, even down to the small ads. I had been on trek for three months and had received no mail because I was moving away from the runners who were following me. There was no chance of mail arriving that night. It was very dark and only wild animals moved at night in these dense forests.

I undressed and was standing naked facing the camp fire, with my back to the water, when I became aware of something behind me in the lake. I don't know how I knew because there was no sound as far as I was aware. But as I turned sharply round, I knew that I was being watched.

And, sure enough, projecting from the water were dozens of heads, dark on top and lighter underneath, each with a pair of beady, expressionless eyes.

With an absurd rush of modesty, I covered my nakedness from this curious, mocking, silent audience. There must, I thought, be something they found ridiculous in me for them to congregate while I undressed. I tried to stare them out of countenance, but they were unabashed.

I flashed my torchlight on them, but they neither blinked nor moved. They just stared.

Then I realised that they had finished the rice I had thrown in and come to the surface to beg for more. They were turtles. Some had their backs exposed above water. I recognised the species, the Leikpok or Stinking Turtle, related to the Stink Pot Terrapin of eastern North America. They were unfit to eat and offensive to touch because of the musk-like secretion in their inguinal glands. I had woken the unfortunate Aung Net up on many surprising occasions, but I felt that I could not rouse him for more rice to feed to stinking turtles.

So I said good night to them and went to bed, rather glad to know that I had their company during my sleeping hours, as well as that of the worried Molly Mia.

As I crept under the sleeping-net, my camp bed creaked more than usual. In order to stop the creaking, I settled myself as

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quickly as possible. I wanted to hear the eerie silence of Leiksakan. Silence can be more deafening than any sound, when one is straining one's ears to hear something—either familiar to bring one back to the ordinary world or else so far beyond the normal range of human hearing that it is almost supernatural.

Listening to the rustle of the deep silence sent me to sleep. When I woke at dawn the stinking turtles and the ghost-like egrets had vanished and there was nothing but this still, beautiful lake and the grasses and the wall of forest round. I was enchanted by the light of the rising sun. My heart was light as a feather. And I took the decision which had hovered in my mind the night before. We would rest a day here, or even two, so that Po Loo could catch us up.

And when the letters came, and the newspapers, perhaps I should spend a further day reading them. This lake was two thousand feet up. Compared with the valleys, it was cool, I told myself. But I knew the real reason lay deeper. It was a separate place . . .

Aung Net brought my cup of tea and asked for orders for the travelling elephants. I knew even before I said that we were going to stay here that the decision would be unpopular. I could forecast his answer. " The place is full of jungle nats and spirits, Thakin," he said.

Normally I used to draw Aung Net out on his jungle superstitions if he did not volunteer them himself. But this time I was prompted to tell him the story of the lake, as it occurred to me. I am not sure where it came from, but I found the invention very easy. I must have been thinking of what had happened the night before and composed the story, in true Aung Net fashion, during my sleep.

" I will tell you, Aung Net," I said very seriously, " why this place is full of nats. Long long ago there was a monastery hut where we are camped now." I was thinking of the clearing in the bulrushes. " A number of Yatheits came here during the hot season. They came to devote themselves to meditation, because Leiksakan was no ordinary waterhold. It was a lake, yet it had no inflow and no outflow . . ."

I saw that I had caught his attention. " It never dried up," I went on, " and it never will dry up. The hermits fed the turtles and the fish. They became tame and then they became sacred. The hermits stroked them. Some became so tame that they allowed slips of gold leaf to be stuck on their heads."

I had not consciously seen any gold leaf on the heads of my turtles. But I had scored a bull's-eye. Aung Net stared at me with his mouth agape.

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I evolved the story in order to explain the tameness of the turtles, and my explanation so convinced me that I spoke as if I had actually seen a yellow-robed monk standing by the lakeside feeding them.

" Tonight, you must come quietly here after dark," I said. " Bring cooked rice balls with you and I will show you the turtles which make this place called Leiksakan. They live as long as elephants and perhaps if we are lucky we shall see one or two with gold leaf on their heads."

He received the story with the same sort of conviction he betrayed when he told me his own tales of tree and water spirits. " But why did the Yatheits stop coming? " he asked.

" How do I know that they have stopped coming? " I said. " Or perhaps it was we, or people like us, who drove them away. We came to the jungles to find teak. And the oozies, learning that the hermits had fed the fish and turtles until they were tame, came with fire torches at night and called, ' Nga! Nga! Nga! ' pretending to feed them, but instead they caught them in nets."

Aung Net accepted this with such credulity that I felt as if I was telling him the truth, as if I knew what had happened, though there was nothing for me to go on except my intuition.

As he turned to leave me in peace and solitude, I said, " Do you think Po Loo will arrive with mail today? "

" Gay Nay lah *lane* mee," he answered without hesitation. In Burmese this was very emphatic.

I expected him to say, " Gay Nay lah mee," meaning " Oh, it'll come today."

The addition of the word " lane " meant he was absolutely sure that the mail would arrive. And there was no more reason for his knowing that than there was for my knowing about the yellow-robed monks feeding the fish and turtles.

The expression cheered me. I trusted Aung Net. There are many ways of knowing things quite certainly, but not by reason, and in the East both the wise and the simple accept this in a way that is lost to the Westerner, who is so keen on finding reasonable explanations that he has no time for what he could learn by other means. I believed that Po Loo could not be far away.

With anyone else than Aung Net, I would have been afraid that my story of oozies catching the fish and the turtles would have been passed on to my oozies to give them the same idea. They cared little for the Buddhist faith, and however sacred the animals might be, they welcomed any fish or meat in their curry.

But during the whole day I saw no one fishing, nor indeed any sign of life. I was tempted, not being a Buddhist myself, to try a fly rod on the lake. But something restrained me; perhaps that I

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shouldn't set a bad example or more likely the feeling that in a strange way this really was a holy place.

Po Loo did not arrive. The day passed, and in the evening light the mist flowed in again. The white egrets glided home to roost. As it grew dark, the light from my pressure lamp and the flames from the camp fire shone and flickered on the water's edge.

I felt dejected. I had been keyed up all day by that conviction of Aung Net's, "Gay Nay lah *lane* mee."

I passed the time by carving a turtle on the handle of my jungle knife. There was no room for any other animal. After each stroke of the delicate blade of my penknife, I licked it. There was just enough acidity in my spittle to soften the ivory. I was pleased by the way it came out.

When Aung Net brought my evening meal, he brought a double portion of rice for Molly Mia. But the Alsatian's appetite had returned. She didn't leave a grain for the turtles

When she had swallowed the last grain, she looked up at me as if to say, " You can throw them the bowl if you like."

I could see the disappointment on Aung Net's face, and also the amusement. He adjusted my mosquito-net, fixed everything for the night, and said, " Have you seen any turtle or fish today, Thakin? "

I shook my head.

" Have you seen Po Loo or my mail? " I asked.

" No," he said.

" You've been wrong about Po Loo," I said, " but I can promise you, you will see turtles later tonight."

I tried to keep my tone light, but there was an undertone of annoyance at which Aung Net took offence. He had failed me and he was not going to stay to see the turtles.

The moment he went away, I walked very quietly to the edge of the lake with the torch in my hand. I could see, even by the light of the pressure lamp, that they were waiting, little dark knobs like closed lily buds, breaking the water.

I switched on the torch and swept the beam over the assembled audience. The news had been passed around. They were in force.

I stamped on the ground to cause vibration in the water and called, " Nga! Nga! Nga! " They seemed to increase in number, the expectant heads, the beady-eyed, flat-headed, green-black brutes with their throats raised as if waiting to be tickled.

This was what I wanted to show Aung Net, but I was afraid that if I called him I should attract the attention of the other servants also. I decided to wait until they were asleep.

I was fascinated by the turtles, or rather by their tameness.

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There is something strange about discovering a mark left in nature by some earlier human being . . .

From my servants' quarters, there was a sudden commotion. I stood up and shouted, " Bah lai? What is it? ". The turtle heads popped underwater.

Aung Net ran to me, jabbering excitedly that Po Loo was here. The oozies had brought him in. He was ill. I must come quickly.

" Bring him here," I ordered. There was only one decent pressure lamp in the camp and if Po Loo was ill, he had better be brought to me.

Aung Net bawled the instructions across to the servants' camp at the top of his voice. There was a thresh of water near in as it went echoing across the lake. My idea that this was a holy place was shattered.

Four elephant men came into the light, staggering under the weight of Po Loo. They were followed by the rest of the oozies, chattering like a school of monkeys. The bearers laid him on the ground beside my camp fire. He was unconscious. I had to look several times before I was sure that it was he.

It was Po Loo, but he looked as if someone had taken a bicycle pump to him and inflated him to near bursting point.

" Where did you find him? " I asked.

" Half a mile back on the ridge," one said. " He came into the camp, staggering."

" Stood there. Didn't say a word. Then he collapsed."

" He's seen a nat spirit."

" He's dying of fright."

" He needs a drink."

Aung Nat had been hanging round indecisively, but on these words he grasped a bottle of whisky and thrust it into my hand.

" Put it back," I shouted. " Bring some hot water."

Po Loo was nearly naked. He had only a lungyi cloth round his hips. I could see no blood, no sign that he had been attacked by any wild beast. But his face, neck, and arms were swollen to immense proportions. His mouth was not like a human mouth. There was this immense upper lip, and out of the corners were trickling two little streams of white foam.

The alarming thing was that he was not moaning with what must have been agonising pain. His body was burning with fever and his pulse was almost undetectable.

The oozies were crowded round, cutting off every breath of air, as helpless as the turtles.

" What's wrong with him? " I muttered in Burmese, as much to myself as them. It was something I had never seen before.

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" I saw a man die of anthrax like that," one said. " Smell his breath."

" It's a plague," said another, backing away.

" No, it's not," said a third. " It's more like quai yoo thee yawgah." The hint of hydrophobia made the others back away still farther.

Aung Net handed me the bowl of hot water and a towel. " Take no notice of them, Thakin," he said, " it's snakebite." And once again he offered me the whisky.

Po Loo's neck glands were so swollen that I doubted whether he could swallow.

" His feet! " called Aung Net. " They're stone cold."

He pulled some embers from the fire towards his feet and began to massage them, while I gave Po Loo a generous draught of whisky. To my surprise, it went down like olive oil, without a cough or splutter. I tried to examine his eyes, but the whole of his face was so swollen that they were like slits in the distended flesh.

Po Loo moaned, and I gave him another dose of whisky. Afraid that his feet were being scorched, I told Aung Net to take the embers a little farther away. Po Loo moaned again and then he mumbled something, so low and distorted that I asked Aung Net to watch those hideously swollen lips and listen to what Po Loo was trying to say.

For some time Aung Net was as puzzled as I had been. Then suddenly he shouted, " Padoo! Padoo! "

The padoo was the hornet of hornets—huge savage creatures with big yellow bay bellies with black rings—the tiger on wings. The saying was that one padoo sting would kill a child, three a man, four a woman, and a nest an elephant.

In a moment Aung Net was streaking off to the cookhouse yelling, " Kyet than! Kyet than! Myan! Myan! Onions! Onions! Quick! Quick! " I ran to my tent and mixed a dilute solution of ammonia.

And soon we were both at work with the specifics of the East and West, Aung Net with onion juice and I with ammonia. At least, I thought, we both agreed about the whisky.

When we had finished our applications, we swathed him in blankets, gave him one for the road, and left him by the fire. At least he was at peace and there was nothing more to do until the morning. " But what about the mailbag? " I asked Aung Net, as I said good night. " Didn't the oozies bring it into camp? "

" I don't know, Thakin," he answered, " but if it's at the oozies' camp, I'll have it brought up."

Peace settled again over Leiksakan.

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I sat waiting for the mail to come, but Aung Net reported the bag wasn't in the oozies' camp; Po Loo had been found without it.

I wondered whether I should go to bed, but it was so quiet sitting by the camp fire looking out over the still lake. Po Loo had fallen asleep. His breathing was irregular. Sometimes he seemed calm, then suddenly he was fighting for breath and then he was calm again. I fed the fire and watched him and the lake. The turtles had given up and gone to sleep; and for a time I went to sleep myself.

It was dawn when I woke from my cat-nap. The fire was ashed over, but when I flung on some more wood it crackled and caught flame.

I bent over Po Loo. His fever had broken. That inflated football face of his had gone down slightly. When he opened his eyes, the slits were larger. He recognised me, and with his wonderful loyalty his first thought was to apologise for being late.

He was weak and in pain and there were plentiful pauses for moans and groans. But he was clearly on the mend. He had hired a guide, he told me, who had taken him as far as Winwa, a tiny village at the head of the Patalone Valley. There the man had fallen sick and Po Loo had waited two days for him to recover. The mail was heavy and the stages ahead were dangerous for a man travelling alone. But Po Loo decided to venture on alone for fear that he would never catch me up.

It was late evening, and he would have halted for the night if he had not found fresh elephant spoor. He plodded on, knowing that he could not be very far from our camp. When he heard the first bell of a grazing elephant, he knew that he was nearing his journey's end and decided to take a rest. He sat down on the trunk of a fallen teak tree just off the game-track and eased the bamboo carrying his mail off his shoulder.

As he did so, he was attacked by hundreds of padoos. There was no time to catch up the mailbag. He fled, followed by the horde of hornets.

He beat them off with his hands and flailing arms. He clawed them from his face and tried to shake them off his hands like soapsuds. But they kept on, aiming always at his head and neck, especially his cheeks and eyes.

It must have been a nightmare in the twilight, this vicious swarm. His cheeks were gathering up so that every moment sight was more difficult. He was being blinded by the swelling of his cheeks and eyelids.

He thought he had gone about a mile with the padoos attacking him and then perhaps two before he stumbled into the oozies'

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camp. After that he knew no more. It must have been a terrifying experience, but all Po Loo said was, " The mailbag is not lost, Thakin. It's by the tree, along with my shan haversack. But be careful of the padoos! "

I knew the mailbag was safe. No one passed through these forests, except once in every three years, and then only in search of teak, as I was. And no animal would venture within twenty yards of a padoos' nest.

But all the same I wanted my letters and newspapers. As soon as it was clear that Po Loo was off the danger list, I decided to organise a rescue party.

It was not a popular movement. Of all the creatures, animal, bird, or insect, that infest the jungle, the Burmans most abhor the padoo. It took me till midday to conscript the volunteer party to recover my mail, and wreak vengeance on the hornets.

Each of us carried a bamboo torch steeped in pine resin at the tip for quick ignition. Smoke was no use against these hornets. You had to have fire to burn their wings, and hats which could be used as masks if need be.

We found the tree trunk easily enough. The broken roots had torn a huge mass of earth from the ground as the tree crashed, after standing for perhaps a hundred and fifty years.

As I saw it from a distance, I thought, That's just the place I'd have looked for a wren's nest when I was a boy. But when I drew closer I saw two spots, one in the base and another hollow on one side, which seemed made for hornets.

I knew very little about the habits of padoos, less than my oozies did, I thought. I looked round to see what they were going to do about it, but it was plain that they were looking round to see what I was going to do.

" It is very simple," I said. " I shall go up and catch hold of the mailbag and run back to you; and if the padoos attack, you'll keep them off."

We all lit our torches, the conscript volunteers standing well back while I went forward to pick up the mailbag. Everything went according to plan. Except that I could see no mailbag.

As I came back, there was loud laughter. " It's the wrong tree," I said.

So we put out the torches and started to search for the right tree. But teak trees were few and far between in that area and fallen dead ones very rare. At last we returned to the old tree for a closer look. Even the oozies plucked up courage to go closer. But never a sign was there of green canvas mailbag or Po Loo's shan haversack.

We were debating whether we should cast around even wider

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to find the fallen tree, when one of the oozies shouted, "Hoke thee. Here we are. Po Loo's shoulder bamboo!"

He went forward to pick it up. Suddenly there was a chorus of yells.

"Tahdectah! Lah byee! Lah byee! Look out! Here they come! Here they come!"

We fled in all directions, one oozie lighting his torch from another as they ran. Then at a distance we grouped together, brandishing our fire-torches.

The padoos came pouring out of a hole in the uprooted stump like a firework spouting yellow smoke. Their courage was amazing. A number of them came in to attack, despite the torches. One of the oozies was stung. Luckily the main horde split up and disappeared. Unlike bees, they did not swarm. If they had done so, they would have routed us.

After the excitement had died down and there was no live hornet in sight, we went quickly forward to burn out the empty nest and to collect the mailbag before the horde returned. But there was not a sign of haversack or bag. Yet there was the incontrovertible evidence of Po Loo's shoulder bamboo to prove that this was the tree where he had rested when attacked by padoos.

The only explanation was that in his panic Po Loo had caught up bag and haversack and then dropped them somewhere away from the tree. But though we searched high and low, ranging for half a mile around the tree, we returned to camp that evening emptyhanded.

Po Loo rejected our theory out of hand. He remembered perfectly well leaving the bag and haversack by the tree. "I couldn't have run, carrying that mailbag," he said. "It was far too heavy. It was Bellat mail—English mail." The head clerk had told him so. And if he had tried to rescue it, he would have been stung to death.

That third night, Leiksakan did not appear to me holy and set apart. My interest in turtles with gold leaf on their heads fed by yellow-robed Yatheit hermit monks had evaporated. I thought only of that lost mail, filled alternately with perplexity as to what had become of it and anger at its loss.

Next day every servant and oozie spent searching for the missing mailbag, on foot or on elephant. But they drew an utter blank. Bag and haversack had vanished. They might never have existed.

Po Loo knew exactly where they were, and the day after the general search he felt well enough to go and find them himself.

Very timidly, flaming torch in hand, he approached the tree.

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Nothing issued from the burnt-out nest and there was nothing lying where Po Loo expected his things to be. He scuffled a few leaves with his feet and came back. " It's not there," he said.

" I know that," I answered, " but where is it? "

He shrugged his shoulders. If the bag and haversack weren't there, by inexorable Burmese logic they were nowhere.

So there we were, faced with a mystery. The oozies argued about it, some suggesting that the mail had been spirited away by nats. One humorist proposed that we should examine the elephant droppings to see if any contained English stamps!

I agreed with Aung Net that the only thing was to move on. I was reluctant to do so. I had never lost a jungle mail before; indeed this was the only jungle mail I lost in the whole of my twenty-five years in Burma, despite the human hazards of dacoity, death and sickness and the innumerable natural hazards such as flood.

For years the story of the vanished mailbag and Po Loo's shan haversack was a subject for speculation in the elephant and logging camps and the jungle villages of the Upper Chindwin forests. Though I offered a tempting reward for return of the bag or its contents, no one claimed it. I came almost to accept the legend that all the gibbon monkeys in the Taungdwin Forest Reserve could read English, having learnt it from the letters they had stolen from the mailbag.

This loss happened in 1924. Twenty years later, when the Japanese were in full retreat before the re-occupying British forces, I camped one night in the Thaungdût Monastery as the guest of an old yellow-robed Yatheit hermit monk. My job was to recapture elephants turned loose by the Japanese as they retreated.

The old hermit was delighted that I could speak his language and he showed me the most courteous hospitality. When I retired for the night to sleep on the hard teak boards of the monastery verandah, he gave me a rusty old hurricane lamp which smoked a bit and smelt of the raw earth oil it burnt, and then for something to read he brought a roll of English newspapers.

I looked at their dates. They were both April 1924.

Outdated though they were, I read them by the dim light of the smelly old lamp with a keen sense of enjoyment. After three years of war in Burma, mail from home was even scarcer and more welcome than it had been on the ridge beside Leiksakan.

When I left at dawn next morning, I thanked him for his kindness and asked how he had come by these papers, since there was nothing else in English in his dilapidated hermitage.

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" I don't remember," the old man said, "I've had them such a long time."

" Did you ever feed the turtles at Leiksakan? " I asked. Leiksakan was only about a hundred miles from Thaungdût Monastery.

" Yes," he said. " Many times. When I was young."

I thanked him and went on my way.

Two months later when we relieved Rangoon, my servant Aung Net came to me. Our reunion was a great joy, even though his story of the Japanese occupation brought tears to his eyes. He had been through hell, and I tried to think of something to take his mind off war.

" You remember the lost mailbag at Leiksakan, Aung Net. Well, I found it," I said. " The old hermit of Thaungdût had it."

" M' lai!—oh Mother! " said Aung Net, as much as to say, " Well, I'll be damned." His wrinkled face lit up.

" But how? " he asked. " You didn't go back there? "

I told him the story of the night I had spent at Thaungdût Monastery, and as he listened I could see that he had found the link missing from the chain. " What I can't understand," I said, " is why the hermit wasn't stung like poor Po Loo."

He smiled at me, a wise old man of the East.

" You should know, Thakin," he said, " there is only one thing living in the world which the yellow-bellied hornet will not attack and that is a yellow-robed hermit monk."

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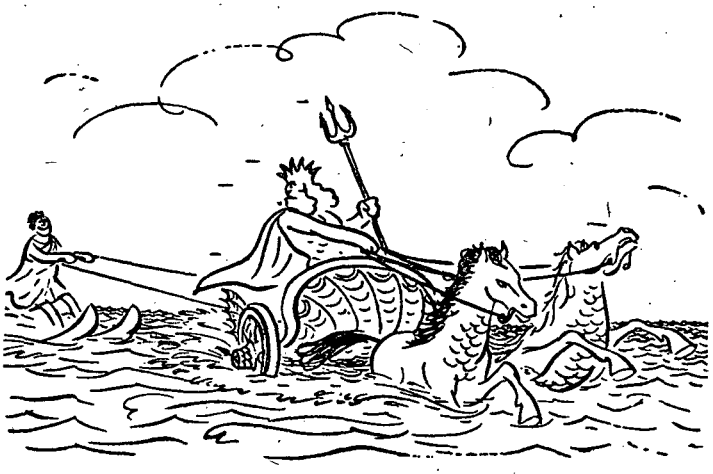

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ALL AT SEA

" No rent, no rates," said he,
" and the world is ours "

BY W. H. BOORE

" WITH boats," said Megan, " you've got to start before you begin. Dab hand you must be; it's experience that counts." She thrust her double chin out firmly—a fearsome, almost incredible feat.

But Dai, for all his fifty years, was eager as a terrier. " No rent, no rates," said he, " and the world is ours."

" Only the wet patches," said Megan.

" The Mediterranean now," said Dai, " only two corners all the way; easier than going to bed—and warmer, too."

" Warmer," said Megan, looking for a moment at the Welsh weather sprawling all over the windowpane. " Well, I like my comforts, but I like something firm underfoot, too."

" A boat," said Dai, " is as firm as the earth itself, only better sprung."

In late September, at Aberystwyth, they moved into their new home—a converted lifeboat with bottled gas for light, heat, and cooking; two berths, a galley, and a reconditioned petrol engine. " I'm not going in that," said Megan, pointing to the dinghy that fawned on its lead at the stern, " not if you've got to sail me up the High Street."

Dai sat proudly in the stern and they started off. " It's a silly place to have a mudbank, right in front of the boat," he said.

They waited for the next tide to lift them off. " Let's sail her back to the Neath river, so that we can start off from home," said Megan, " it's more reassuring than a strange place."

They got going on the rise early that afternoon. Things went splendidly for a full fifty yards and seventy-five seconds, until with a shudder from the boat and a choking noise from the engine, all sound and motion ceased. " Steering from the back is a funny business," said Dai, " and the difference between tiller and rudder is not quite clear to me."

Just then the man in the nearest boat picked himself up again. " What the hell . . .? " he began, but Dai took his language dignified and distant.

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" You have entangled your ropes in my propeller," said Dai. It was a full five minutes before the other paused for breath.

" I never knew," said Megan, as soon as she could get a word in, " I never knew men could be so low as to speak like that."

It was late on the tide when they finally managed to get out of the mess. " Anyway, there's plenty of room outside," said Dai as they approached the harbour entrance. Megan looked over his shoulder at the old school atlas which Dai had kept for so many years just for this.

" Keep to the blue parts," she said. But the words were hardly out of her mouth before the blue parts made themselves felt, for away from high water the harbour bar was a sudden and shocking place. Megan's trajectory through the cabin door without touching ended in a tray of crockery, while Dai finished up holding on to the ratlines on the cabin roof. Fortunately the boat's way carried her beyond the breakers into the comparative calm of the open sea. Dai scrabbled back to the tiller just as the boat was turning for another dip.

" As solid as the earth only better sprung," Megan muttered.

" It slapped her belly," said Dai. " The boat's, I mean," he added hastily. " I'm thinking we ought to go into the waves instead of sideways on."

It was foggy. Dai had not thought of that, and in half an hour they were, as Dai put it, surrounded by nowhere, while Megan was grown very silent.

" Bristol Channel, first left," said Dai, but he spoke without conviction. " How about food? "

" How can you say such a thing! " said Megan.

On and on they went and only time was changing, with Dai lonely and sunk into himself and not noticing there was coming a shape to the greyness before them; until a new sound made him look up—and there was a towering cliff with the sea tearing at its foot, and Dai and Megan and their boat making for it at a full five miles an hour.

"Daro," cried Dai in horror, " we'll be aground in a minute."

" Thank God! " said Megan.

Trying to reverse, Dai stalled the engine; but he tightened himself up, and while the boat still had steering way, turned her to the right—starboard, that was the word. As she wallowed, the cliffs began to recede until only their frown remained. Dai was not to know that the ebb tide was drawing them out.

" Wales," said Dai, " and I managed to dodge it."

Megan stirred. " I'd make a cup of tea," she said, " if you'd keep the thing still. I'd like a cup of tea," she added wistfully, " if only to look at such a thing . . ."

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They ran ashore at about ten o'clock, with the lights of a village, like dew on a web, trembling away to their right. There was a bump, a sudden groaning of the timbers, and the boat washed sideways, heeled a bit, and settled firmly.

" Push off, or wrecked we are," said Dai.

Relief from motion brought a certain sweet reasonableness to Megan. " It's only sand," she said.

" What are you doing, man? " said a voice from the darkness. " If you want a harbour, it's over there. You'll be in a mess if the wind rises."

" Where are we? " Dai shouted.

" Ceinewydd, Cardiganshire," said the voice, " we were walking on the beach when a great big hulk of a boat tries to come between husband and wife. Put your engines in reverse, and I'll try to push you off."

Their helper was a voice in the darkness, as anonymous as an angel; but with his efforts, and on a rising tide, they managed to lurch back into the night.

" We'd better go into harbour until morning," said Megan.

" No, no," said Dai, " how can you suggest such a thing, and them watching us trying to ride a boat up a beach. If I keep edging to ri—to starboard, we ought to be all right."

Megan by now was looking at the map in the light of a pocket torch. " Edge to the right a bit too much," said she, " and you'll finish up at the soft-furnishings counter of a Manhattan store."

For an instant Dai recovered his vision of foreign parts for the asking. " Wonderful thing, the sea," he said.

At that moment the full moon rose to their right, crowning the tops of the waves with lace and making silver veins in the water as delicate as the back of an old lady's hand.

" Beautiful, indeed," said Megan, " but not very feeding—and the pantry is pretty empty."

" Not pantry—galley. But have you noticed a funny thing—even the moon rises in a different place at sea."

" You're going the wrong way, you silly old coot," said Megan.

" Not old," said Dai, " fifty isn't old."

That night's events had filled Dai with a certain claustrophobia. " If I turn right-abouts or left-abouts I might catch some country a fourpenny one, and I don't want to alter the shapes on the maps."

By noon next day, with stomachs empty of food and a cockpit full of water, Dai was wondering why he had tempted fate by making jokes in the middle of the Irish Sea.

" There's a boat coming," said Megan, gazing hollow-eyed at an enormous cargo liner growing out of the west.

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" Wave to him," said Dai desperately, " wave to him for a lift or something. I can't get this blamed engine to restart."

Dai ducked beneath the cabin top. Presently he popped up, weary and stained and cold. " Did you wave? " he asked.

Megan nodded.

" And what happened? "

" They waved back," she said.

About forty minutes later Dai managed to bring the engine to life. " Wet it was," said he, " wet like me; and stiff in the same way. Which way did they go? " Megan pointed to a smudge of smoke lingering about the horizon.

" If they can go that way, so can we," said Dai, " we don't take up so much of the road."

It was nearly four o'clock when they sighted land. Dai approached gingerly.

" There's a hole there," said Megan about an hour later.

" Inlet," said Dai. Dai had had enough of land pouncing on him all over the place, and his entrance of the inlet was a masterpiece of circumspection

"Flat water, there's nice," said Megan as the last breaker changed into the first ripple. " What do we do now? "

" Drop anchor farther in, and go ashore for food."

" You'll go yourself—I'm not going in that thing; where do you drop anchor? "

" Here," said Dai, stopping the engine, crawling to the bows, and tossing the anchor overboard with a grand gesture.

Megan looked at the spot where it had disappeared. " Can't see what good it does down there with the boat up here."

" Oh," said Dai, " I forgot to tie them together."

Dai had never moved so quick in his life. " There's land approaching from all directions," he cried. Fortunately, Megan found a kedge in the stern, big enough to hold the boat in that calm water. Bailing the dinghy was a major undertaking, for the thing was awash, but finally Dai reached land after rowing for three-quarters of an hour—for his new-found fear of solid earth had led him to anchor two miles offshore.

" Where would this place be? " asked Dai in the grocer's shop.

" The village of Angle, in Milford Haven," said the shopkeeper.

" On the way," asked Dai, " from Aberystwyth to Neath? "

" No! " he said. " That's through Lampeter and Carmarthen."

" Not driving a boat," said Dai.

" Oh, by sea! I suppose Angle is as much between Aberystwyth and Neath as anywhere else."

" That," said Dai, " is what I call navigation."

" What's the name of your boat? "

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" *Mudlark*," said Dai.

The grocer gripped the counter. " Hey, Martha! " he called. " Telephone the coastguard and tell him they've come."

He turned back to Dai. " Every lifeboat in west Wales and eastern Ireland been looking for you since you went aground at Ceinewydd."

" Damn! " said Dai, " how do you know we went aground? "

" The man who helped you off saw the name. It's all in the newspaper here."

" Interfering busybody! " said Dai. " How could he read the name in the dark? "

The grocer glanced eagerly through the paper. " He says you loomed that close he could read the name at the end of his cigarette, and that the . . ."

But Dai and his groceries had gone.

" Let's get out of here," he said breathlessly to Megan when he got back, " perhaps the fuss will have died down by the time we get to Neath."

" Fuss? " asked Megan.

" Small I felt," said Dai, " with all western Wales and eastern Ireland laughing at us."

Dai reached the open sea in the end, but it was a bit of a struggle keeping three miles from each side of a passage only a mile wide. Once outside, Dai steered east by the simple expedient of sailing into the rising moon. Easy that was; you could not miss the thing, so bright and beautiful and welcoming, with the bows of the boat reaching out to it.

As Dai explained to the kind gentleman whose ocean-going tug hauled him just in time away from the buttresses of Lundy, he had completely overlooked the fact that the moon was moving westward.

Next day was hazy but filled with light. " It's due south all round," said Dai after they had trailed an elusive east in all directions. And all the time the engine was sucking away at its store of petrol, so that the following night, though fine, was frustrating. " There's not much future," said Dai, his voice coming thin across the waters, " there's not much future in rowing a dinghy and towing a great hulking boat."

The day after that was beautifully fine, with the hills of Wales to the left and the cliffs of Devon to the right; at least, that is what they thought until the destroyer which, guided by helicopter, came along to refuel them, had turned them round.

Then they coasted up the Bristol Channel on a fine, calm morning. " One thing about going to sea," said Megan happily, " there's always someone about to give a hand."

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But Dai was a broken man. " Sorry I am to get you into all this trouble," he said.

" It's over now," said Megan, " we're nearly home."

" Too soon you are crowing," Dai said.

And he was right; right for the first time since they had left Aberystwyth. " Let's sail through these corks," said Dai, " they look friendly and make you think of bottles at the local."

The herring-nets hanging from them were not disentangled by the time their irate owner came along late that afternoon.

" Very sorry," said Dai.

" Sorry," blared the fisherman—then he glanced at the name on Dai's bows. It seemed to silence him. " Where are you going —or trying to go? " was all he asked.

" Neath," said Megan.

" I'll be serving humanity if I take you there," he said. " Here, read the papers while I take you in tow. You'll never get your screw clear of what's left of my nets until you reach the river."

And as the *Mudlark* was towed ingloriously to her moorings, Dai glanced at the newspaper headlines.

HOLIDAY CRUISER SETS LIFEBOATS A PROBLEM
AMATEURS " ALL AT SEA! "
BOAT DISAPPEARS FROM ANCHORAGE
THE NAVY CALLED IN
THAT BOAT AGAIN

At dusk, as the Neath river glided ghostly upon its bed between banks of thick grey ooze, there were few to see their shame when the fisherman dumped them in a quiet reach, swinging gently from their kedge. They tried to thank him, but he said no thanks were due, as he was only looking after his own interests and those of other users of the sea. He hurried away as though fearful things crouched behind him.

Dai looked out at the black scene; the smell of mud assailed him. " Even my soul is damp," he said.

Megan put a fat, comforting arm on his.

" I'll sell her tomorrow," said Dai, " or give her away. You were quite right. You've got to have experience to sail a boat."

" Dai bach," said Megan firmly, " experience we have now had; and if you think we're going to waste all that we've gone through, you'd better think again. Now where did you say this Mediterranean place was? "

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★ ★ ★

SHE-SHANTY

Ship: A word always referred to as she because the rigging costs so much and she always keeps a man on the lookout.

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☆ *From Dante onwards, poets have been fascinated by the tragedy of Paolo and Francesca. Among the outstandingly original entries for The Argosy Award was this new treatment—seen through the window of a City office—of one of the world's most haunting love stories.*

MISS DARIMINI

BY WALLACE CRAWFORD

LOOKING her up and down, I was not being rude. I just couldn't help it. It was not as if you could say she was that "sort" of woman, for she would be impossible to classify. Hers was not the slick perfection of the front page fashion model, nor the lush promise (and no performance) of the prominent film star. She was, I suppose, the sort of incredible creature who haunts the dreams you can't remember.

Her figure was not, in fact, particularly noticeable. She was slim, although not very slim; and tall, although not very tall. You will see I am having some difficulty in describing her, and this is not surprising, since none of the men who knew her could describe her adequately.

It was her face which compelled. In the black, shining frame of her smooth hair it was an oval not so much of seduction as of resignation and acceptance. Her features, excepting her large dark eyes, were small. Her mouth was a trifle out of character, because the wide, full lips implied something different from the astounding spirituality of her gaze.

Certainly I fell for her myself, although that is hardly the right term. Let us say she enslaved my preoccupation for ever, which is precisely what she did to the others. Fortunately, or unfortunately, as you may look at it, the full treatment was not for me, so that I am capable, at times, of being dispassionate. But none of the others can be this: not Bonfigli, who left her in Amalfi, nor Nodier, whom she left in Paris, nor Hines, who wanted to make her a star in Los Angeles. And what about Paul Gibbons? Can he speak rationally of her now? I doubt it.

Perhaps Cuthbert and Lovell would be able to talk about her, but these she only brushed in passing, and they are both incapable of intelligible conversation anyway. But I begin to be unintelligible myself. Let me start again.

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Cuthbert brought her up to my office, because she had some bonds to dispose of. We are not stockbrokers, we are solicitors; but we are used to all sorts of inquiries and as Cuthbert lives near me and is an old and valued client it is not unusual for him to call with odd bits of business.

But when I first saw his companion I had an inkling as to why he wouldn't take her anywhere near the Stock Exchange. He sat down, uneasily, in the easy chair and she took a seat opposite my desk. She sat primly, her hands folded in her lap. Not for her the gleaming teeth nor the vast display of leg. She directed at me that impartially spiritual gaze, detached, almost impervious.

I dropped my eyes. "Well," I began, fiddling with my pen, "what is it all about?"

"Miss Darimini has some bonds," volunteered Cuthbert.

"Darimini?" I echoed. I had not really taken in the name when he introduced her. "Not Francesca, surely?" I was trying to be jovial.

"I'm afraid so," she replied. "They all ask that. Or nearly all." She raised to her lips the cigarette Cuthbert had given her, and I noticed how brightly the tip of it glowed. "It was a whim of my father's. He was by way of being a Dante fan." I felt something of a shock at the way she put it. Yet her English was almost perfect. The idiom and accent could hardly be faulted.

"I see. Perhaps we'd better have a note of your address. Where are you staying?"

"There's some difficulty about that," interposed Cuthbert, his fat jaw shaking with excitement. "I wanted to talk to you about that. Later."

"I see." I frowned at him. Already his proprietary air was beginning to irritate me. "Very well. Let me have a look at these bonds, then."

A pompous and opinionated man, I thought, if ever there was one, as he fished in his briefcase for the documents. How on earth a great pot-bellied oaf like him had managed to hook this delicate, ethereal creature was past my comprehension. She seemed out of her element as it was, without him tagging at her side. Perhaps, I thought darkly, he has some hold over her. These thoughts were all the more remarkable since I had never regarded Cuthbert as anything other than a Christian gentleman, kind and thoughtful, a pillar of society and an ornament to his parish church. However, he seemed in a pretty state at the moment, and I surmised that as he rummaged he was making a pretty state of the interior of his briefcase. But with a final tug he produced the bonds, and after a glance of abject apology at his companion he thrust them across the revoltingly spurious

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patina of the modern desk which the last lot of interior decorators left me with.

"I put tape round them," he said, "to stop them falling to pieces."

I unfastened the tape, and glanced through them. There was a prewar Italian bond, a Confederate States Bond of 1860, a bond of the Imperial Russian Government of 1825, a Papal bond of 1651, a bond issued by the House of Bardi, in Florence, in the year . . .?

I couldn't make out the year. I put them together and tied them up again. Cuthbert leaned forward eagerly, glancing repeatedly at his companion. I found his behaviour distasteful; clearly he was intent on ingratiating himself with her. She seemed disinterested; not so much indifferent to my findings as out of the office altogether.

"They're worth nothing," I said severely. "In the market they wouldn't give you a shilling for them. On the other hand, they might fetch quite a lot. That Bardi bond, for instance, or the Papal bond, if you could find a collector—"

"That's what I thought," interposed Cuthbert, now more composed. "But it would take time. A collector. Meanwhile—" he sat up, straightened his back, addressed the board meeting—"they are Miss Darimini's sole assets, it appears. Rather unfortunate. We must do something about it."

"Yes," I agreed, noncommittally. "Where on earth did you get them, Miss Darimini?"

I had a notion she disliked the way I phrased the question. From under her dark, straight eyebrows she shot me a glance of protest, but recovered herself quickly.

"Where on earth?" she repeated. "I've always had them. In the family, you know."

She must have guessed that, in England, this would be sufficient explanation. And so, once upon a time, it would have been. But I didn't press the point.

"She has no money," said Cuthbert, out of the blue.

"No money?" I repeated. It didn't really seem to matter, as it would with most people. After all, she was bound to survive. If it wasn't Cuthbert, it would be someone else. Me, for instance. And why not? Cuthbert was over sixty. I am not yet fifty.

"And where have you come from?" I asked, to gain a little time for thought.

"Paris," she said simply.

Later, when I learnt from friends of Bonfigli that he had met her in Perugia, his native city, and that she had then said she

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had just come from Damascus, I thought of this moment, and I realised that if she had said she had come from Tristan da Cunha it would not have made one jot of difference. She could have come from anywhere.

"No money?" I said again, rather foolishly.

"A few francs," she said, as if to prove her story. From a tiny white handbag, she tipped the notes in her lap. I noticed the handbag was stained. Could it be mud she had on it?

"Well," I remarked, with rather less than my usual caution, "I think we can arrange to advance . . ."

"That's not the point," interrupted Cuthbert sharply. "Francesca, I mean Miss Darimini, has nowhere to sleep, and I want you—"

"Nowhere to sleep? But where has she been staying?"

"Mr. Cuthbert was kind enough to find a hotel room for me."

"But she doesn't like the hotel. Prefers family life. Says she always has. Besides," added Cuthbert, with a perceptible pause, "she has no clothes."

"She seems adequately clothed to me." I thought her simple brown dress very fetching. But of course, she would look fetching in anything. And in nothing . . .?

"I mean she has nothing but what she stands in," said Cuthbert forcibly.

"Quite so," I murmured.

"As a matter of fact, we bought her a few things this morning. In Bond Street. I suppose you haven't got an old suitcase knocking about the office, that you could lend me." Cuthbert looked uncomfortable, and I could guess why. A new suitcase is rather obvious.

"Yes," I said slowly, "I can lend you a suitcase. What else?"

"It's like this," said Cuthbert, raising a finger at me. "I want Miss Darimini to stay with us for a few days. Just while she finds her feet."

Finds her feet, I reflected. She'll be off her feet if you have your way, you old wolf. I could read his thoughts like an open book. It didn't occur to me then that I was also reading my own. And it didn't occur to either of us that it was not in this way that she took her hold on you.

But the lady herself had suddenly stooped and lifted a large paper bag, then tipped the contents with startling effect over the surface of my thick but subdued carpet. A frothy cascade of silk and satin and nylon billowed and subsided.

Cuthbert put a finger to his collar. "You must wait till we get the suitcase, my dear," he remarked kindly.

"Yes," she agreed. "Of course. But they are all so bright,

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and clean, and pretty. It seems a shame they will get dirty so easily."

It seemed a curious remark, and I shuddered slightly, I don't quite know why, for I knew little of her then. Perhaps it was the very incongruity of the remark.

But Cuthbert had missed it. "Let's get back to the point," he said, averting his eyes from the pile of frippery on the carpet. "I want her to stay with us, but for the next few days my wife has her brother and his entire family . . ."

"Look," I said hastily, "you want her to stay with us for a while? Is that it?"

"Exactly. Until Sunday. My wife's brother will be going then. At least, I hope he will." I could imagine that up till that moment Cuthbert had only disliked his wife's brother.

"I'll ring Anne. We can go home at once."

He gave me a suspicious glance. "There's not all that hurry," he said.

"It's nearly four," I countered.

"Well, we might as well get it settled. It's very good of you," he added grudgingly.

"Not at all."

"You are sure Anne won't mind?"

"Anne is the soul of hospitality."

"I'm sure she is. On the other hand, you'd better find that old suitcase. Your wife might not be so hospitable towards a paper bag."

I saw his point. I found the case, Miss Darimini expressed her gratitude with an ineffable grace, and we made ready to depart. She went down the stairs ahead of us, and a faint, smoky perfume floated up to our nostrils.

"Where did you find her?" I whispered to Cuthbert.

"On Victoria Station. Yesterday afternoon."

"Really, old man. At your age."

He hadn't got the grace to blush. As a matter of fact, he grinned in what I thought was rather an evil fashion.

At two o'clock the following morning I awoke, because I heard someone singing. It occurred to me at once that along the passage, in the best room we could give her, lay Miss Darimini, all alone. Perhaps it was not a commendable thought for a man of my age and station, but it just came to me.

Understandably, my wife had been a little unenthusiastic at first, especially as I had omitted to warn her by telephone.

"An Italian girl?" she said distantly. "Where did he get her?"

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"Look, Anne, the girl has nowhere to stay at the moment."

"Curious," she remarked, and led the way upstairs.

But in the bedroom, Miss Darimini succeeded in winning her over. I've noticed it's a thing which often happens when two women get together in a bedroom. I daresay they discussed the purchases in Bond Street.

"Poor child, she does seem rather alone. And curiously uninformed, when you consider how much the young women think they know, these days." Anne said this as she came down the stairs, and that was all she said. But from it I gathered that Miss Darimini had been admitted not only to hearth, but to home.

The singing had stopped when I realised I was fully awake and not dreaming, but I was certain I had heard it. And it was not a woman's voice. It was a man's, to the accompaniment of some stringed instrument. A harp? A lute?

Then I heard it again, and with the inertia which two hours of warm blankets will bring I listened for a while, but finally I seized my electric torch and got up. I peered down at Anne's bed. She was fast asleep. I went to the window, and opened it wide. Abruptly, the serenade ceased, but the greedy beam of my torch swept the lawn as I leaned from the window. A slight movement to my left caught my eye. It was Miss Darimini, closing her window.

I went back to bed, excited and puzzled. Who the devil could it be? Not Cuthbert, surely. Besides, I knew Cuthbert could not sing a note. Who, then? If only I had heard the words, for the tune was unrecognisable: a sort of lilt, full of foreboding yet defiant with passion.

The very thought of it prevented sleep. I had to know and there was only one way to know, and that was to ask Miss Darimini herself. And there was only one time to ask her, and that was now. In the light of day she might deny it as a dream. Perhaps it was a dream.

But if it was a dream there could be no transgression in creeping along the passage to her room. I crept. As I opened her door I could hear the singer again, faintly urgent in the distance. She closed the window as I entered, and turned, but without haste or sign of guilt. She was clad in a long nightgown, white and diaphanous, hardly with substance, through which the lines of her body glowed with a rosy hue.

"You came," she remarked factually. "I was afraid you would. I knew you would."

"Do they all come?" I whispered. "The men?"

"Yes, they all come. It is rather sad."

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Above her bare shoulders, smooth and glistening, her long neck rose like a column to her pale, accepting face.

"Why is it sad?"

"Because for most of them it is a waste of time. I am meant only for . . ." She broke off, and lowered her head in a fashion I found heartbreaking.

I was impelled to take a step towards her.

"Be still," she said commandingly. "Or you will simply become unhappy. I am a great breaker of homes. Besides," she raised her head and gave me a disarmingly contemporary smile which broke the tension, "you have a most charming wife, whom I should not want to hurt. And neither would you."

"No," I murmured. At once it seemed incredible I should be in the room at all, standing in pyjamas before a chit half my age. What on earth had got hold of me? I wanted to disappear, and quickly. But there were things I had to know; and I had a notion I should not get again the opportunity to know them.

"Who was the singer?"

A half smile, not mocking, simply acquiescent, came to those full lips which were the only features really physical about her.

"I think you know," she said.

I did not hesitate. "And where do you come from?"

Her timeless youth became charged with a frightening antiquity. "I think you know," she repeated, gently.

My eyes fell before the sad challenge of her gaze, falling on the hem of her white garment. There was thick, black, slimy mud on that hem. I fled back to my bedroom.

Cuthbert came for her on Sunday, just after luncheon. I wanted to warn him, but what could I say? He simply wouldn't understand. I had to leave it to Miss Darimini's own sense of compassion. When the door closed behind them I heaved a sigh of relief, and Anne gave me a sharp glance.

"A very lovely child," she remarked, "and intelligent. But where does she collect all that mud?"

"Mud?" I said stupidly.

"Yes, didn't you notice? She always has mud on the hem of her frocks. There's been a drought for weeks. Where in the name of heaven could she collect mud like that?"

Where, in the name of heaven, indeed? I knew now why she always wore clothes of sombre hue: black, and brown, and grey.

All the men who consorted with her were called Paul. I found this out after she had left our little circle (the term is entirely fortuitous.)

Paul Bonfigli is a successful portrait painter, although recently

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his brush has been still; Paul Nodier is a distinguished historian, but during the last year or so his Clio has been mute; and Paul Hines . . . well, in his way, Hines is the greatest of them all. His motion pictures have been ousting the ordinary from the cinemas of the world for a decade. He was working on what was to be the greatest of them all, "The Inferno," when his wife, that great emotional actress Margaret Dunstable, suddenly sued him for divorce on the grounds of adultery with a young Italian starlet.

They say that Hines is dead to the world, and I think they are right. When he came to London last, I contrived to be at his side one evening for dinner, and he sat hunched, physically and mentally, like a man lost in Limbo. I did not dare question him.

When I wrote to Bonfigli, pleading the exigencies of business, since I still had those remarkable bonds about the office, he did not bother to reply, but friends of mine who met him in Italy say he has lost all contact with his subjects and is drinking himself into stupidity. It seems a poor ending, both for the affair, and the man.

Nodier I had known as a young man, and I went to see him in Paris. He received me pleasantly enough, but was hardly capable of rational conversation. Nodier was different from the others, more unfortunate. Bonfigli was a known philanderer, and for Hines there had been one starlet after another. But for Nodier it was the first, and as he realised, the only love. I got bare details from him. They had met in the Louvre, casually, they had dined, they had spent a fortnight in the South. And then she had left him; left him emotionally spent, at odds with his family, and bereft of all capacity for work. That is the terrible thing. If a man can work, he is saved; if he can't, he is lost.

As Nodier said when he shook my hand in farewell, "I am sorry. There is nothing to say about it."

She did not stay in our part of the world for long. Cuthbert, completely forgetting himself, pursued her pursily; but Mrs. Cuthbert soon got wind of it and intimated that the young foreign woman should get other accommodation. Besides, as she complained to Anne, there was some man who came singing outside her window every night, and this was not only disturbing, it was positively indecent.

"No wonder poor Bertha Cuthbert got fed up," Anne observed. "You must admit it's funny."

"Peculiar," I admitted.

Jack Lovell had been taking her out to dinners and theatres while she was staying with the Cuthberts. Lovell walked out

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on his wife without a word, and left the silly woman distraught. She *is* rather a silly woman, but rather lovable, and it seemed extraordinary, especially to herself, that anyone should let her down.

However, Lovell turned up again within the week, with a bewildered expression on his red face and words of contrition on his lips. He bought his wife another mink coat.

He said they had gone to Stratford, apparently at Miss Darimini's suggestion, and at Stratford he had lost her. He had no idea as to how he had lost her. It was simply that one morning, or one afternoon, he was not sure which, she was not there. He vehemently denied sleeping with her.

So the months began to slip by and I wondered if we should see her again. I had an overwhelming desire to see her myself; just to look at her; but even that began to fade. At least I still had the bonds. Foolishly, I used to take them out of the safe and turn them over, and wonder about her.

Then some rumours began to get around, and Anne heard them. "Do you know" she said severely, "that girl we had with us, what was her name? She's carrying on with Paul Gibbons now. How many more, I wonder?"

It appears they met on the banks of the Avon, one moonlit evening while Clara Fabian, Paul's wife, was playing Ophelia. Paul did not even wait for the end of the performance; he took Miss Darimini away the same night. They were seen at Newmarket, and they were seen at Ascot; and for long periods they were not seen at all. Clara went on doing Ophelia and Imogen and St. Joan just as lustily as she had done before, but a bitter note crept into her performances, and in a month she became a really great actress. Commiseration, for an actress, is a hard thing, and her friends missed no opportunities. But there are compensations.

Paul Gibbons is one of my clients, and he rang me up late one afternoon. "I'm going to Italy for a while," he said guardedly.

"Yes?" I replied, with equal care.

"I suppose you know?" he went on.

"My dear chap," I said candidly, "who doesn't?"

"Well, I can't help it. Look, I'm going in rather a hurry. I'm going tomorrow. There are one or two things I must clear up before I go. May I come to your office early tomorrow, before the boat train is due, and dash off one or two signatures?"

"Of course," I agreed. He told me what he wanted done and rang off.

In the morning Miss Darimini sat by the open window, watching the swirling traffic below with a detached wonder.

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I stood at her side. Behind us, Paul Gibbons sat at my desk, dashing off his signatures.

"Where are you going?" I flung at him over my shoulder. I had never liked him a great deal.

"Rimini," he replied.

I stared down at her. "Why?" I said softly.

"There has to be an end," she replied.

An end to the affair with Paul? An end to her own pilgrimage? I was not to know, because Paul interrupted us.

"Look," he said, "I haven't got any cash at all. Lend me some."

This was usual with him. He owed fivers and tenners all over the country.

"There's nothing here," I replied. "But the bank's next door. If you like to draw a cash cheque I'll sign it and you can collect it as you leave."

"Good idea," he commented. "No, better one. You two are old friends. You talk to her while I slip downstairs. I don't want to drag Francesca into the bank."

His eye fell with a heavy and theatrical yearning on her as she sat by the window, framed in light. I reflected that he was unable to divorce the actor even from his ordinary life. I noted his lean, dark face was getting a little fleshy at the chin. He took the cheque and left us alone.

"Perhaps you'd better take these," I said. "They might come in useful another time." I proffered the bonds she had left with me on her first visit.

"Perhaps I'd better," she agreed, accepting them.

"And what now?" I said.

She was silent for a moment, and then, to my astonishment, I saw a tear trickle down her pale cheek and fall to her grey dress.

"Weeping," I exclaimed. "But why?"

She returned my gaze defiantly, the tears brimming in her magnificent eyes. "Once in a while, I may weep. And it is only then that I know anything like happiness again."

"Do you love Gibbons, then?" I said.

"Of course not," she flashed up at me, with disdain on her wide mouth, and already her eyes were dry. "I hate him. Worse than that, I dislike him. It is easy to be with someone you hate. It occupies the mind. But with someone you simply dislike—what a bore! And all these practised philanderers are bores. They become so besotted with me. It is not the kind of love I knew."

"But why go on like this?" I pressed her. "What about the unhappiness you spread in your path? What about the wives?"

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She rose to her feet, and she seemed to grow taller with the supernatural dignity which was her birthright.

"You think I don't care?" she demanded. "But I do care. That is the punishment."

"I don't understand," I protested. "Why should you go through this eternal suffering for what was, after all, simply a youthful peccadillo?"

She laughed, shortly and bitterly. "What a different age you live in, my dear friend. Perhaps you, too, will be rewarded according to your lights. But don't be too sure your sanctions are different from mine. I simply accepted the sanctions of my life and time, and when I defied them, I accepted the punishment. Things were ordained differently in those days, that is all."

"But listen," I said urgently, for I could hear Gibbons on the stairs. "What about the women who go on like that now? The women who break up marriages? They don't believe in all this stuff. No sanctions. Do you mean to say they get away with it, just because they don't believe in Hell?"

"Oh no, my friend. Oh no." She dropped her voice, for Gibbons was waiting for her at the door. "They don't get away with it at all. Down there," she nodded at the floor, "they don't feel anything, those women. Nothing at all. That *is* Hell."

And this time it was Miss Darimini who shuddered.

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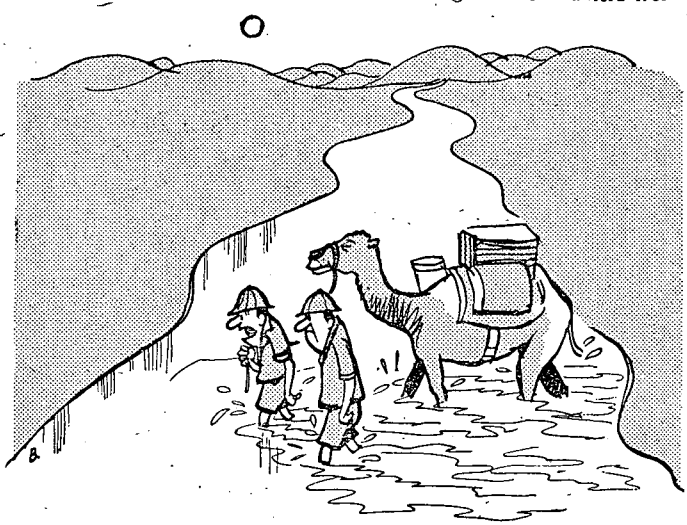

"I suppose this IS a mirage?"

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It was a lover and his lass,
With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino . . .

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Bright is the ring of words
When the right man rings them,
Fair is the fall of songs
When the singer sings them . . .

And when the west is red
With the sunset embers
The lover lingers and sings
And the maid remembers.

R. L. STEVENSON, *Youth and Love*

Wedding Finger

She made for a while as if she dreamed not of the meaning of my gaze, but tried to speak of other things, faltering now and then, and mantling with a richer damask below her long eyelashes.

" This is not what I came to know," I whispered very softly; " You know what I came to ask."

" If you are come on purpose to ask anything, why do you delay so? " She turned away very bravely, but I saw that her lips were trembling . . .

" I must have all love, or none; I must have your heart of hearts; even as you have mine, Lorna."

While I spoke she glanced up shyly through her fluttering lashes, to prolong my doubt one moment for her own delicious

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pride. Then she opened wide upon me all the glorious depth and softness of her loving eyes, and flung both arms round my neck, and answered with her heart on mine—

"Darling, you have won it all. I shall never be my own again. I am yours, my own one, for ever and for ever."

By this time I had taken one sweet hand and gazed on it with the pride of all the world to think that such a lovely thing was mine; then I slipped my little ring upon the wedding finger.

R. D. BLACKMORE, *Lorna Doone*

Love Token

The ring so worn, as you behold,
So thin, so pale, is yet of gold:
The passion such it was to prove;
Worn with life's cares, love yet was love.

GEORGE CRABBE, *His Mother's Wedding Ring*

Magic Circle

I remember being taught that a circle is the perfection of infinity. I said this to my lover, and added: "I can prove it."

"How so, little one?"

"Our love is perfect and infinite and always follows the same routine. Our love is a circle. First we look at one another, then we kiss gently; then we speak our love and kiss more ardently; then the flesh awakes, the hands are soft but eager, our kisses become fierce and passionate; then, after all is over we murmur our happiness and our thanks; then we kiss gently once more; finally we just look at one another.

"Later—more slowly perhaps—the same circle is gone over again. It is like a ring round our lives—the ring of love."

He cried: "An enchanted ring! And you the adorable fairy who makes it magical!"

JEANNE AURELIE GRIVOLIN, *Breviary of Love*

Gay Gold

"O there is the fairest young lady
As ever my two eyes did see.
She has got rings on every finger,
And on one finger she has got three;
With as much gay gold about her middle
As would buy half Northumberlee."

The Loving Ballad of Lord Bateman

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Postman's Ring

Last night in my dreams I was charmed with a dove,
Who a billet-doux dropt at my feet;
Thus I guessed that ere long I should hear from my Love
And the thought made with joy my heart beat.
Had the Postman but stolen fleet Mercury's wings,
This news he had brought long before.
Mind, Sarah, the next time a letter he brings,
I charge you the moment he knocks and he rings,
You run with more speed to the door.

WILLIAM TAYLOR, *Maids, Wives' and Widows' Penny Magazine*, 1832

Ring of Passion

" You won't send me away? " she whispered pleadingly, like a terrified child.

A hard sob broke from him and he kissed her trembling lips fiercely. " Never! " he said sternly. " I will never let you go now. My God! If you only knew how I wanted you. If you only knew what it cost me to send you away. Pray God I keep you happy. You know the worst of me, poor child—you will have a devil for a husband."

The colour stole back slowly into her face and a little tremulous smile curved her lips. She slid her arm up and round his neck. " I am not afraid," she murmured slowly . . .

E. M. HULL, *The Sheik*

Official Semicircles

A ring from his finger he instantly drew,
And right in the middle he broke it in two;
And half he gave to her, as I have been told,
And they both went a-walking to Blackberry Fold.

ANON

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OH, ONCE IN MY SADDLE

He was a rootin', tootin', pistol-shootin' cow-waddie again

BY DAVID LAMSON

I REMEMBER the day was Sunday, because my mother and sisters had taken the light team and driven uptown to church, and were going on to have dinner with the Finleys if the river was not too high to ford. And it was the end of July, because my father made me stay home to help sharpen the mowing-machine blades. We were going to start cutting timothy next day.

It took an endless time of turning the heavy grindstone before my father was satisfied with the edge on all the little triangles along the cutter bar. There was an uneven place in the grindstone over which the steel skipped quickly, so that the sound of steel on stone was cadenced and not an even blur.

Some of the time my father made it easier for me by singing in time to this beat. One favourite song of his fitted the rhythm especially well:

Oh, once in my saddle I used to go dashing,
Oh, once in my saddle I used to be gay;
I first took to drinking and then to card playing,
Got shot through the body, and now here I lay.

My father had been a cowboy before he married my mother and took up a homestead in Northern Alberta and became a farmer. He knew quite a lot of cowboy songs, but I liked that one best.

He ground the blade that was in the mowing-machine first; and when we finished it, I went over to the well and pulled up a bucket of water and stood leaning against the poplar tree by the kerb, sipping the icy water and looking at the blister on my palm, wondering if my father would want to start on the spare blade right away.

But the spare blade had two broken teeth. My father went over to the blacksmith shed and started cutting them out, and I began to walk towards the house as if I wasn't going anywhere in particular. But he called me back.

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" You might go hunt up Sam and Bess," he said. " I want to have a look at their shoes. We'll put them in and give 'em a feed of oats."

So I got a halter and a pan of oats for bait, and went down through the woods looking for Sam and Bess, our work team. I did not hurry because I kept thinking about that grindstone.

I followed the cowbell first; Sam and Bess often grazed near the cows. But they were not there.

Then I went past the head of our clearing, over to the thick growth of spruce and jack pine in the north-east corner, where they might have taken shelter from the mosquitoes and bulldog flies. But they weren't in there either.

I went back through the woods, looking along the fence for a break or for sign that they had jumped it, although neither of them was breachy and it was a good fence. It was made of poplar rails nailed to tamarack posts, the rails put on green and the bark slit along the top so the rain would peel the bark off and let the rails season.

I told my father the horses were gone. He looked as though he didn't believe me, but he came with me and we looked along the west side. There was one place where the pasture came right out to the road, but to get to that place the horses had to cross a little neck of muskeg swamp, which they did not like to do. But there were tracks beside the fence here.

My father walked slower and slower then, looking at the fence, and pretty soon he stopped beside a panel and pointed to some marks on the rails next the post.

He said the top rails had been knocked off and the horses taken out and the rails put back. I was not sure of this, but my father was sure. I mean, I found it hard to believe, because that meant our horses had been stolen, and people in our country did not steal. But there were nicks in the rail, and in the nicks were little streaks and flecks of red paint. The man who knocked down the rails had used a new axe with paint on the head.

And my father showed me places outside the fence where the kinnikinnick bushes were scuffed and broken; and in the bare ground beside an anthill there was the mark of shoes, one calked, the other smooth. Sam and Bess were shod rough in front and smooth at the back.

We could not tell anything by tracks in the road because a lot of teams had driven along it during the day, but it looked as though our horses had been taken north towards Willow Creek, because whoever stole them would not be likely to take them south past our place and towards town.

My father squatted on his heels beside the tracks for a few

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minutes, thinking, and he didn't say anything, and I didn't say anything either because of the way he stuck out his jaw and made his eyes narrow. By and by, he stood up and started back to the house, walking very fast, so I had to trot to keep up.

I said, not very loud, " You want me to get Corporal Macey? "

Corporal Macey was the North-west Mounted Policeman in our district. He wore a red coat and blue breeches with a yellow stripe down each leg, and he looked fine. He was in charge of all the country between the Saskatchewan River and the Rocky Mountains, a strip eighty miles wide and I don't know how long, but with not many people in it except around our town and over at Willow Creek. Everyone in our country thought Corporal Macey was quite a man, which he was.

But when I asked my father if I should go for Corporal Macey, he grunted. " Huh! " he said. " I guess not! I guess I can still make out to handle my own affairs." And in a minute he began to hum that song, " *Oh, once in my saddle I used to go dashing—*"

Back at the house he took down his .30-30 carbine from the rack behind the kitchen door. I said, " What you going to do? "

He said, " Do? I'm going after that team, of course! Go saddle a horse! "

I said, " What horse? Ma's got the other team at church."

He knew that as well as I did, but he had forgotten. He had gone back in his mind to the days when he was a cowboy and there were horses all over the place.

" That's right," he said. " I plumb forgot. I can't go afoot after a horse thief! Go see if Bellows will lend me a horse. Hustle! "

So I hustled. I knew how my father hated to borrow from anybody, especially from Fred Bellows because Bellows was shiftless, and if we borrowed from him then, he'd feel free to borrow from us. But there wasn't anybody else within two miles.

The Bellows house was only a quarter of a mile south, a rackety old cabin made of little fire-killed spruce logs. Mr. Bellows wasn't at home, but his wife was, and I asked her for the loan of a couple of horses. I told her ours had strayed.

There was no use telling her everything; she talked too much. And, besides, all the little runny-nose Bellows kids were standing there listening, with their fingers in their mouths.

She said I could take the two horses in the corral. I knew, without looking, which ones she would give me.

They had several pretty good horses, and these two old crowbaits. One was a big rangy bag of bones named Bill, a grey; he had been a cavalry horse in the last war. The other was Nancy,

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a fat old mare, so sway-backed she could hardly get over a barn doorsill without touching.

I thanked Mrs. Bellows, put a bridle on Bill, and climbed on him; and when I was out of sight of the house I managed to kick him into a trot, although sitting that sharp backbone of his was like riding a ridgepole.

Father was waiting down by the barn. The carbine was leaning against the wall, and Father was wearing his old six-gun and cartridge belt, and he had on his high-heeled cowboy boots. Never but once had I seen him wear those boots. That was at a Dominion Day celebration uptown three years before.

Father had got all dressed up for it, chaps and all, and had gone riding Stub, my buckskin pony. In the middle of the parade Stub had stumbled and thrown Father into the dirt street. Father had gone over to the wagon, his face very red under the dust, and pulled off his chaps and boots, and driven home in his stocking feet. He sold Stub and had not been on a horse since.

Father looked at old Bill and Nancy, and snorted. "Well, beggars can't be choosers," he said. He looked at me sharply. "I thought I told you to get a horse."

I said, "I thought you meant a horse apiece."

His eyes crinkled up and he grinned on one side of his face. "All right then," he said. "After all, you're fourteen."

I ran back to the house and got my little .22 rifle and a box of slugs. I saw a note he had left on the kitchen table for my mother:

Gone looking for horses. Back when we find them.

So he had meant me to go all along.

When I came out, my father had got his rope out of the granary and was tying it to his saddle. He had put the rope away when he did his boots, and wouldn't let me touch it. It was a good rope. He grinned again when he saw my rifle, but he didn't say anything about it—just shoved his carbine into the boot.

With one foot in the stirrup, he remembered something. He said, "Hey, Bub, where's my spurs?"

I said, "I don't know, Father," which was true.

"Sure you ain't seen 'em?"

I said, "Not for a long time," which was also true; and I'd been trying for a month to remember where I left them. But I couldn't see any good reason to say that.

He climbed up on old Bill rather slowly, because old Bill was very high and my father was getting rather portly.

About a mile up the road we overtook Mr. McKenzie, driving his ox team with a load of dry poles from the strip where the fire went through two years before.

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Mr. McKenzie was a hairy little Scotsman who talked with his lungs instead of his mouth and lips. He worked all the time, Sundays and all. So did the other Scotsmen in our country, which may be why they went on living there while other people got starved out.

When my father saw Mr. McKenzie ahead of us, he hitched his gun behind him a little and let his arm down over it, as if he was embarrassed to be seen wearing it. The oxen stopped when we got near the wagon, and Mr. McKenzie looked round.

His bushy eyebrows twitched when he saw our guns and the horses we were riding, but he was too polite to ask questions. My father and Mr. McKenzie had known each other for eight years, but they still called each other "Mr." Now they talked for a while about the weather, and haying, and the new hay shed for which Mr. McKenzie was hauling poles.

Then my father said, "Well, I can't start cutting if I don't find that team of mine. They got out last night or this morning. You haven't seen anything of 'em, have you?"

"That 'ud be a white mare and a bay gelding, no?" said Mr. McKenzie. "Nay, I ha'na seen 'em. Perhaps Jim or Alan might, though they said naught to me; but ye might ask of them as ye pass by."

He looked at the cartridge belt and at the butt of the carbine sticking out of the boot.

He said, slowly and unwillingly, "Now, I had it in mind that ye bought that team from over Calder way."

My father said, "That's right." He and Mr. McKenzie looked at each other.

Mr. McKenzie knew that when horses stray, they go back to their home range. He knew that Calder was fifteen miles south. But we were riding north. So Mr. McKenzie understood why my father carried a pistol and a rifle to look for his horses.

He wanted to say something. He moved uncomfortably and smoothed his moustache and rubbed his nose. "Maybe," he said, "ye'll be gettin' a shot at a deer, eh?"

"Might happen," said my father. "Or some kind of varmint. There's still some around here."

"Aye," said Mr. McKenzie. He looked attentively at the brown rumps of his oxen. "A'weel, Corpor-r-ral Macey is a fine man. Be sure he does na catch ye shootin' out o' season."

That was as close as politeness would let him come to remonstrating with my father.

For a time my father had a sober, thoughtful look, but presently his eye lighted up again and he prodded old Bill along and began to whistle softly.

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We met other teams, and we stopped to inquire at houses beside the road, but no one had seen our horses. And none of those to whom we spoke were as wise as Mr. McKenzie, nor as well acquainted with my father, so they made nothing of the fact that he went armed. In those days people commonly carried rifles or shotguns, for there was still plenty of game in our country. And even six-shooters were not really uncommon.

Homesteaders' cabins became more and more infrequent. Beyond Ed Johnson's place, seven miles north of our ranch, we came to a clear, sandy stretch over a jack-pine ridge. My father swung out of the saddle and knelt in the road, looking at the tracks there.

"They been through here, all right," he told me. "I'd know those shoes in a thousand."

A mile farther on we came to Tom Davis' cabin, the last one south of the muskeg country that separated our district and the Willow Creek settlement. Davis was an American who had filed on this homestead only the year before. No one knew very much about him.

Davis had made a start at a clearing, but he had not got very far with it. The timber in that section was heavy—poplar and spruce, with some jack pine.

When we come up to the cabin my father called, "Hullo there! Anybody home?"

Davis came out.

"Howdy?" he said. "Somethin' I c'n do for you?"

It was not polite in our country to ask a question like that. A polite man would have waited for my father to say what he wanted.

My father said, "I'm lookin' for some strays. Haven't seen anything of 'em, have you?"

Davis looked up and down the road as if he expected to see them there. "Why, no," he said. "No, I haven't seen any horses up this way at all. Tell you the truth, though, I ain't been out around much today. Fact is I ain't been out at all—got a touch of grippe or somethin'. What's your team look like?"

"Pair of brown geldings," my father said. Davis glanced up quickly, with a surprised look, but my father wheeled old Bill round towards the road. "I got to be gettin' on home to do the milkin'. They wouldn't hardly have come this far anyway, I reckon."

"Well," said Davis, "I hope you find 'em. If I see anything of 'em, I'll let you know."

My father nodded, and we turned south the way we had come. Davis stood in the door, watching us go.

By trying hard, I kept from saying a word.

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When we were out of sight of the cabin, my father looked over at me and grinned.

"Well?" he said. "Anything on your mind?"

"Yes," I said. "How come we're going home?"

"What makes you think we're going home?" he asked me. "You see anything funny about that coot?"

I had, but I wasn't sure just what it was. And my father had lied in describing our lost horses.

"How'd he know I was lookin' for a team of horses? I said 'strays;' not what kind or how many. Another thing, he had too much 'the fact is' and 'tell you the truth.' If a man ain't lyin', he don't need to say he ain't. . . You go back up the road like you'd dropped a jack-knife, see if you can see what our friend Davis is up to."

He took Nancy's rein. I slipped out of the saddle and ran back up the road, head bent. But I was looking all around and feeling very important, like an Indian scout. I came up behind a big fir tree, stealthy as Kit Carson, and peeked out at the cabin. In a minute Davis came out, carrying a shotgun. He went across his clearing and into the woods behind it, following a path through the mountain currants and young poplars.

I told my father what I had seen.

He looked as cheerful as the day before Christmas. "Ah!" he said. "Now we're getting down to it!"

He pulled Bill round. "Come on, jughead," he said. "Let's see you travel."

He laid into Bill with the rein ends until the dust flew, and I pounded on Nancy with my willow switch, and I was really surprised at the way they rattled along.

I expected him to turn in past the cabin and follow Davis, but he stayed in the road.

I asked him, "Don't we follow Davis, Father?"

He gave me a disgusted look. "We're goin' where Sam and Bess went," he said. He pointed to the road. "There's their tracks. If you can't be smart, be as smart as you can."

After a minute he must have felt sorry, for he went on, "Don't never come up behind a man that might be lookin' for you to come up behind him. Thing to do is surround him," he said.

By and by, we came to a section marker—a heap of dirt with an iron stake driven in it. The marker was almost at the edge of the big muskeg. Beside the marker there was a footpath into the woods on the east side of the road. My father sat looking at that path.

I looked, too, but I couldn't see anything, although it was only about six o'clock and the sun was still well up. In our country in

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summer you can see to read until nine o'clock or after, and it doesn't really get dark all night because it is so far north the sun can hardly get out of sight.

Father showed me where a strawberry plant was torn up, and looking closer I could see the outline of a hoof-print. Then we started down the footpath, letting the horses walk. And while we rode, he talked to me in a very low voice.

"This quarter," he said, "is all swamp. But the one next to it, cornering on Davis' place, there's high land, a hundred acres or so, sticks out into the muskeg, kind of a finger of poplar ridge. I heard there was a couple of young fellows settled on it a while back. We'll go look in on 'em."

Pretty soon he left the path and rode down towards the swamp. All the sloughs and muskegs in our country have little fir trees growing round the edges, a belt about twenty feet wide with the trees so close together nothing bigger than a rabbit can get through them. But every so often there will be a break where deer and moose went through when the trees were younger. When we came to one of these breaks my father rode through it to the other side of the fir belt, and we went along the edge of the muskeg towards the poplar ridge he had mentioned.

The horses made no noise at all on the thick brown-and-green moss inside the fir belt. There was no noise at all anywhere in that whole country, not so much as a bird song. All I could hear was the creak of the saddles and the hum of the mosquitoes.

It was so quiet I began to get scared. I felt very angry with the horsethief for getting me into this mess. I envied old Nancy, slogging along over the soft moss and groaning every once in a while—envied her because she didn't have any imagination, and so did not know what she might be getting into. If she had known all I knew, she would have turned round and run away with me. And that would have been all right with me too.

I had a severe case of the gollywobbles. Most of all I was afraid of having my father know I was scared. So I rode Nancy over as close to Bill as I could get her, clamped on to my little rifle until my whole arm ached, and kept my hat pulled down so my father couldn't see my face.

We came to where the poplar ridge curved out into the muskeg, and we followed along the edge of this finger until we reached the point where it curved back. My father rode cautiously here, expecting to find a break in the fir belt at the point. Sure enough, it was there. He stopped just inside it and looked, and then he pulled old Bill back beside me.

"They're in there," he whispered. "Sam and Bess. Over a ways, staked out, I think. What'll we do now, Bub?"

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"Whatever you say."

"Their shack'll be back at the other end of the ridge," he said, as if to himself. "I really ought to go warm their jackets for 'em—and Davis—he was in on it. Still, there's no use lookin' for trouble, and the cows need milkin'. . . . Imagine puttin' horses on a long line in woods like that. . . . Maybe we better just take 'em and get along home. Take the picket ropes with us and whoever owns 'em can come ask for 'em, huh?"

I was strongly in favour of that programme, but before I could say so my father put his hand up to be quiet. Somebody was coming along the ridge behind us—somebody in a hurry.

"Too late now," my father said, looking pleased. "They've come to move 'em—just one, it sounds like. Davis was in it, sure enough. You stay here till I call you. I'm goin' to put the fear of God into those dudes."

He waited until we could hear someone walking along the ridge opposite the opening in the fir belt. Then he gathered up the ends of the reins and belted old Bill as hard as he could.

Bill jumped clear out of his tracks, out into the open, and my father had his gun out and was hollering, "'Get your hands up, horsethief! Reach for it, blast you!"

Of course I was right along behind him, in spite of what he said. I saw this young fellow, this Charlie Semple, standing too startled and frightened even to put up his hands.

My father had his pistol pointed at him, and he was booting old Bill up to him and calling him a lot of names.

Charlie Semple's eyes were popped away out, and his jaw was trembling and his mouth making queer twisting motions, and he really looked green. He had yellow hair and a long nose and not very much chin. He wore an old black pullover with a big hole in the side.

Sam and Bess were over a little farther, below the curve of the ridge. Sam whinnied a couple of times when he saw the other horses, but neither Bill nor Nancy answered him. I looked down the ridge the way Charlie had come, in case Davis or Willie Bemis, Charlie's pardner, might be following him. But I didn't see anything, so I watched Charlie Semple.

I had never seen a man really frightened, so frightened that he had lost track of everything and didn't care any more, and couldn't think enough to care. When a man is only a little scared, he is ashamed of being scared at all, and he will try to cover it up. But Charlie Semple was scared sick and witless.

At first he couldn't say anything at all, but my father kept prodding him, cursing him out, and asking him what he meant by stealing our horses, and waving that big pistol in front of him.

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And pretty soon Charlie began saying, " Don't! " in a weak, moaning voice. That was all he could say.

" Don't! Don't! Don't! "

It made me feel a little sick to see Charlie Semple like that, because he was a human being and not acting like one. I guess my father felt the same way.

He stopped yelling at Charlie Semple and just sat and looked him over for a minute, and then he leaned over and spat on the ground in disgust.

" Go on," he said to Semple. " Let's go see that pardner of yours. Where is he—back at the cabin? "

Semple nodded his head helplessly.

My father said, " Well, get goin', then."

When Charlie Semple didn't move, my father rode old Bill right into him, and then Charlie dodged away and started back up the ridge, hurrying and stumbling.

I thought Davis might have heard Sam whinny and come along with his shotgun to see if there was anything wrong; but my father did not think so.

" That yahoo ain't smart enough to figure like that, nor brave enough to do anything about it if he did," my father said. " Might as well bring the nags along with us, though; save coming back. You go get 'em."

So I went back for Sam and Bess, and overtook my father and Charlie just before they came to what was meant for a clearing. It was only about an acre, and the trees had been whittled down and let fall every which way. They hadn't even been trimmed up. It was a pitiful sight, even for a tenderfoot's homestead. There was no way to get through the tangle, so we rode round the edge of it, towards the cabin.

The cabin was not much more than a brush heap with a chimney stuck in it and a pile of marsh hay for a roof. The walls were all whopper-jawed, and it looked about ready to fall to pieces, although you could tell it had not been up long. There was one little window in it, with a flour sack nailed over it instead of glass.

When we came in range of the cabin my father rode up close to Charlie Semple, in case Davis was tempted to let off his shotgun, then yelled, " Come out of it, you horse-stealin' coyotes! Come out right now, with your hands away up! "

My father was having a good time. I could see he was a rootin', tootin', pistol-shootin' cow-waddie again, in his own mind. Like in another song he used to sing: *I'm a lone wolf from Bitter Creek, and it's my night to howl!* This was his time to howl. And man, I thought it was wonderful. It was living in a Wild West story. I'd forgotten about being scared, I was so proud of my father.

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"Come out," he whooped, and he added some words he'd licked me for saying.

Then Willie Bemis came slowly through the door, looking almost as surprised as Charlie had, but more sullen. Willie Bemis was not much more than twenty. He had black curly hair, and he had more chin than Charlie; but he was weak, though not such a weakling as Charlie.

"Where's Davis?" my father said to Willie Bemis. "Trot him out here!"

"He's gone," said Willie Bemis. He was a Cockney, so the words sounded like, "'E's gorn."

"Gone where?"

"Back 'ome, I suppose, where 'e said 'e was going." Bemis started to put his hands down, but my father would not let him, so he clasped them on top of his head and stared at Father defiantly.

My father said, "What do you mean by stealin' my horses out of my pasture and bringing them off up here?"

"We never stole your bloody blasted horses," Willie Bemis said.

"They come in here and tied themselves up back there, I suppose," my father said, sneering.

"We found 'em straying a mile down the road and tied 'em up until we could find out who they belonged to. As you might have found out, you blasted Yankee, if you'd ask questions instead of sneakin' around people's places wavin' a gun and a-usin' bad language. Who do you think you are? Why, gorblimey, I ought to give you in charge for this."

He was shaking his fist at my father—although still remembering to keep his hands up—and my father was too surprised to say anything for a minute. Then he got very red, and made a strangled noise in his throat. He looked down at Charlie Semple, who was still standing beside old Bill. "Get over there, you!" my father said. "Get over beside that other polecat!"

He took his left foot out of the stirrup and prodded Charlie Semple with it. Then he looked surprised, and grabbed for the horn. Because old Bill suddenly lay down under him.

He didn't fall down or collapse; he just lay down, as if that was what he wanted to do, so he did it. I never saw a horse do that before or since.

If my father had had his spurs, he would have lifted him up all right; but as it was, all he could do was to step clear.

His face got redder and redder, and he looked at old Bill, and then quickly at Willie and Charlie to see if they were laughing at him.

I was careful not to make a sound, because I knew my father

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was perfectly furious. Old Bill made him look ridiculous, and he hated that above all else.

My father said to Willie Bemis in a level, deadly voice, " Young feller, you lie like hell. Where I come from, there's just one thing happens to horsethieves. And this is it."

He shifted his gun to his left hand, reached over to his saddle, and took down his rope. He slipped the coil to his left hand holding the gun, and shook out a loop behind him, stepping away from old Bill as he did so.

I knew—or I was pretty sure—that my father was bluffing. But Bemis and Semple weren't sure at all. What little they knew about the West they had learnt from the movies. And my father was mad enough to sound convincing. Willie Bemis' jaw dropped when he saw the rope, and he got deathly pale.

" It's too bad," said my father, " that I only got one rope. One apiece would be easier on you; you'd die quicker. But I got no time to fool around. So—"

His arm gave a twitch, and the loop flew forward. But my father had not stepped far enough away from old Bill. The loop stung his ear, and he lurched up on his feet, spoiling the cast.

As he came up he caught his foot in a root or something, and almost went down again, and in trying to save himself he came lunging right at my father and knocked him down. He sat down, hard, and had to scramble fast to get out from under Bill's feet.

I pretended afterwards that I did it to keep Bemis and Semple from taking advantage of my father's accident, but really I was just excited. Anyway, when my father fell down I shot off my little .22.

It seemed to me to make a feeble pop, but it must have sounded more impressive to Willie and Charlie out in front of it. Their hands went back up as high as they could reach, and instead of looking at my father, they watched me.

My father got up on his feet and he was whispering to himself. He jammed his six-gun into the holster and unbuckled the belt and laid it over a log. Then he walked over to Bemis and Semple.

He stopped right in front of them, and he began to slap them as hard as he could, first Bemis and then Semple, left hand, right hand. It sounded like a whole colony of beavers smacking the water with their flat tails. When they tried to dodge away from him, he grabbed them and cracked their heads together, and then he smacked them some more.

After a while they were both on the ground in front of him: Charlie spread out face down and crying real tears, Willie all hunkered up with his arms wrapped round his head.

" Now tell me why you stole my horses," said my father.

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So then they told him.

It was quite a story, and all mixed up the way they told it; but it came down to this.

Willie and Charlie had been sailors. A year before, their ship had been in Montreal, and someone had told them about the great opportunities for young men in Northern Alberta. They did not like the sea, so they had pooled their savings and started out together to homestead.

They knew nothing at all about farming, much less about the peculiar combination of woodcraft and agricultural skill essential to the homesteader in our country. They didn't even know enough to ask questions—or perhaps they were too proud to ask, out of that contempt which sailors have for landlubbers. Then, too, they were very young.

They had had a bad time. But Willie Bemis had a mother and father in London, and to them he had written brave fairy stories, picturing the homestead, not as it was, but as he wished it to be.

And then his father—a draper's clerk—had died, and his mother wrote that she was coming out to live with him. His father's insurance had been enough to pay for the funeral and for his mother's passage.

In two more weeks his mother would arrive. Willie was desperate. They had confided in Davis, their neighbour, the only one in the whole country who had shown the slightest interest in them. They had gone uptown with Davis the day before, and Davis had provided them with consolation out of a whisky bottle. They had stayed in town all day and until late at night, and on the way home our horses had been stolen.

It was hard to determine just what part Davis had played in the actual theft. Either they were protecting him or they really could not remember because of the whisky. Willie insisted he did not know whether Davis had suggested the stealing, or who had suggested it. He was sure that Davis was not with them when they got the horses. But he had lent them the axe and the new well-rope which he had bought that day in the town.

When they came past his cabin with the horses, they had told him what they had done; and he had advised them where to hide the team until the next night, when he would take them out through Willow Creek and round by Mulvalen and sell them in some distant place where they could not be traced. With the money thus gained they thought they might fix things up before Willie's mother arrived.

They took us round to the other side of the cabin, and showed us how they had tried to build a new cabin for her. There are many wrong ways to build a log house, and the two ex-sailors had

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hit most of them. They took us into their own cabin—a dank, dark, waterlogged hole, smelling like an abandoned root cellar, and everything in it mildewed—even the blankets in which they slept.

My father looked and listened.

When he came out of the cabin he sat down on a stump and poked with a twig at some chips. My father had forgotten he was a lone wolf from Bitter Creek. His jaw no longer stuck out, and his eyes were not narrow and keen, but thoughtful. He looked like a middle-aged farmer, a bit on the portly side. He did not look like a cowboy at all.

We three youngsters stood and watched my father prod the chips, waiting for him to speak. We were no longer enemies, nor strangers; but we were not yet friends, we three. We were in the uncertain middle ground of emotion that comes with an abrupt shift in a human relationship. We might become friends, enemies, or nothing. Now everything hung suspended between us, and it was for my father to say which way the balance would fall.

My father said slowly, " God alone knows why the fool-killer didn't get you two long ago. You are ignorant young lunkheads, and you stole my horses. I don't know why that puts it up to me to take care of you; by rights I ought to turn you over to Macey. Anyhow, here's what. There's a cabin on my place, two rooms. I been using it for a storehouse. It can be cleared out. You can come down there and live. Burn this—this hovel down, if you can make it catch. Then you can tell your mother you was burnt out, if you want.

" I start haying tomorrow. You can help me with it. When we get the crop in, the four of us'll come up here and put up a decent place to live. One of you can cut wood for me this winter, for grub and some cash and the rent of a team to get this place cleared off and ready to plough next spring.

" There it is, now. Take it or leave it," said my father.

They took it.

When we passed the Davis cabin my father handed me Sam's bridle rein and told me to ride on ahead slowly. He went up towards the cabin alone. His pistol was wrapped in his slicker and tied to the back of his saddle. I was afraid again, seeing him go in there and knowing Davis had a shotgun. But my fear was unnecessary.

Looking back through the twilight, I saw the cabin door open to his knock. My father stood for a moment, talking, and then lunged forward suddenly. For a little while there was a great tumult within the cabin—the sound of blows, of pounding feet,

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the crash of breaking furniture. Then Davis ran out of the door and across the clearing and into the woods, and that was the last I ever saw of Davis. Next time we passed that way his cabin stood open and deserted.

My father stood in the doorway, watching him go. Then he picked up his hat and came down the road towards me, stuffing his shirt into his trousers. I rode back to meet him. He sat down beside the road and pulled off his cowboy boots deliberately. He sat there wiggling his toes and weighing the boots in his hand, considering them.

At last he said, "You want these damn things, Bub? I won't be wantin' them no longer. They don't seem to fit good, somehow."

I took them gladly. In his stocking feet my father mounted our brown plough horse, and we rode home to do the milking.

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THE LONG AND THE SHORT OF IT

Bless 'em all, we say, whether you make short work of our seven questions or land up at your wits' end. Wavelength shortcircuited? Then take a short cut to page 115.

1. *Who were: a. Longfellow;*
   b. Long John Silver;
   c. Long Meg of Westminster?
2. *How would you respond to the Bulgarian toast: "Issalonkwai!"*
3. *What is: a. the longest word in the English language;*
   b. the shortest verse in the Bible;
   c. the longest place-name in the British Isles?
4. *What was: a. the longest boxing match with gloves?*
   b. the shortest boxing match?
   c. the longest tug of war?
5. *Can you identify: a. the Long Range Desert Group; b. the Short Range Desert Group?*
6. *What are these initials short for:*
   a. L.A.M.D.A.
   b. U.N.E.S.C.O.
   c. P.S.P.U.S.S.
7. *Do you know what is the longest recorded flight for a homing pigeon?*

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PERFECT CAMERA

He ran into his dark-room—
grinning like an ape

BY GERALD KERSH

BY SHEER good fortune, when I got lost one misty evening trying to find my way to a place called Strood in Kent, I saw a light in the window of a pleasant little house and, there being no human being in sight, made bold to knock at the door and ask my direction. I observed that there was an ancient brass plate under the knocker, bearing the inscription: J. Hilton-Joyce, L.R.C.P., M.R.C.S. This, evidently, was the house of the village doctor.

A little old gentleman opened the door. I noticed that he was wearing a velvet smoking-jacket of obsolete cut and a tasselled smoking-cap such as I had not seen since my grandfather's day.

He looked at me sternly. "Sorry, not in practice," he said. "Try Dr. Minnow, Vail Road, three miles up—" He added anxiously, "Unless it's a really desperate emergency; in which case, come in and I'll telephone. In any case, come in before we both catch our deaths of this infernal mist. Warm yourself; have a hot drink. Where's the trouble?"

I said, "You're very kind, sir. I will, if I may. But I didn't come for medical attention; I came to ask my way to Strood."

"Oh goodness gracious, you've gone astray, indeed! You are seven bad miles out of your direction, young man, and the mist getting thicker. You'll never walk it. Take off your hat and coat. Sit by the fire. Warm yourself through."

"Could I, perhaps, telephone for a car?"

"Not a dog's chance, sir, of getting one. What the devil possessed you to walk to Strood in this weather? Or any other weather? No no, that's none of my business. Now, sit ye down. Try the leather chair. The kettle's on the hob. I was about to treat myself to a whisky toddy." He was busying himself, now, with glasses and lemon and sugar.

He peeled the lemon with an old-fashioned scalpel with an ivory handle, and it was a pleasure to see him do it. He got the aromatic part of the skin off in a beautiful spiral thin as tissue-paper; put it aside in a glass dish, and then went on to remove

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the pith, never once breaking the delicate membrane which encloses the juicy fruit.

I said to him, "You must have been a remarkable surgeon in your time, sir."

He could not quite hide his pleasure at the compliment, but tried to shrug it off with, "In my time? Do you know how long ago my time was? I've been retired this thirty years. Yes, sir, I was one of the good old materialistic Edinburgh school. Studied my surgery under M'Kechnie—only no ambition. Lazy. Industrious by fits and starts. Can you guess how old I am?"

"About sixty-odd, sir?"

"Eighty-five. I come from these parts. I was general practitioner for a little while in London. Was born under this roof. When my father died and left me a modest competence and this property, I came down here to browse and drowse my life away. Although sometimes it gets lonely, especially this misty time of the year. The mist, it gets into the marrow of your bones and gives you the creeps. I'm glad to have your company tonight."

I said, "I must admit there is something scarey about this mist. It reminds one of ghosts."

"Sir, I do not scare, and I do not believe in ghosts. I never saw one. I am a pragmatical man of the good old Edinburgh school, and have yet to be convinced of the existence of hobgoblins, witches, flibbertygibbets, magic, the Evil Eye, and so forth."

"Evil is in the eye of the beholder," I remarked.

This pleased him. He said, "There you talk sense! Before your time, when I was practising in London, I treated one such. Did you ever hear of Manxman the photographer?"

"I can't say I ever did," I said.

The old doctor unlocked a secretaire and took out a faded photograph. "What do you think of this?" he asked, handing it to me.

It was a face out of a nightmare. Its predominant expressions were indolent cruelty, sly lust, latent savagery, and swinish greed most curiously blended in a look of odious shyness. Every feature seemed to be, somehow, a hair's breadth out of place. It was not merely subtly and hideously malformed—it was all wrong. It was evil.

Observing my expression, my genial old host chuckled and repeated, "What do you think of that?"

"I should hate to meet a man with a face like that on a night like this," I answered, swallowing hard.

"And who do you think it is, eh?"

"I don't know, but I hope he's hanged by now," I said.

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"Well, I'll tell you who it's supposed to be. That, sir, is Manxman's impression of *me*, taken with his so-called Enchanted Camera. And how do you like that?"

He took back the photograph, replaced it in its envelope, and put it in its drawer, saying, "I don't care to have it framed. It upsets people. But as you say, evil is in the eye of the beholder. Why, man, you look all white about the gills! Have another toddy."

"Who the devil was this Manxman?" I asked.

"Give me your glass and I'll tell you," said Dr. Hilton-Joyce, and so he went on to tell me . . .

It may not be in your line of business, sir, but I have always noticed something peculiar about microscopists, men wholly involved in microscopy. It seems to me that they are neither in nor out of this world. They get into trouble, of course. Look at Galileo. Yes, I know, he made a telescope. But if it were not for this confounded mist and you could see the stars, Galileo's telescope would be in point of fact nothing but a microscope in reverse, bringing the macrocosm within scope of the microcosm.

Let us not be obscure. Consider the case of the philosopher, Spinoza, a lens-grinder, who tried to bring the universe closer. All he got for it was a bad chest through crystal dust.

And this fellow Manxman—he, also, started as a grinder of optical lenses, specifically for scientific purposes. He made a microscope for Pasteur. Manxman, also, got short sight and a bad chest.

But in his way Manxman was a genius.

Half blind, he could *feel* a refractive index or an angle of parallax. Upon my word, that fellow could almost smell and taste the quality of light! He worked as an apprentice seven years for Plafon in Paris, and as journeyman for another five. Then—it might have been crystal dust again—something went wrong with his eyes.

The great Louis Pasteur delivered him out of the hands of butchers like me, and kept him in the dark, very simply, until Manxman could see again. Vision distorted? Very likely. But vision of a sort. He went to work, half by touch, and made himself a pair of spectacles. Then, back to his bench with everything clear after all those years of shadow.

At about this time men of the calibre of Lumière were experimenting with moving pictures.

The American, George Eastman, was mass-producing his little picture-boxes—I believe there was some trouble, some

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lawsuit with a clergyman concerning the shutter? I forget.

Well, it worked out like this: Manxman, back into the light after years of the mist and twilight such as you have got lost in this very evening—and after I don't know how long in the absolute dark—decided to build the perfect camera. Now, as you must know, a lens-grinder, even then, could command a high wage. Necessarily so, poor devil, because his lease was short.

No breach of professional confidence—the man has been dead fifty years, and no issue. Yet, for about a year, he could have had—I hate the expression—any woman he liked, although he was not much to look at. This, you understand, is an understatement; but I come from the old school where we were accustomed to moderate our statements.

He was ugly in a sickly way, poor Manxman. His chest had fallen in, he had acquired a spinal curvature, and in his face a horrid rictus. His hair was long, and his linen dingy. Since he could not shave himself and hated barbers, poor Manxman had a beard, very long and wispy; and those extraordinary pebble-crystals he had ground for himself magnified his eyes out of all proportion. And all the time he coughed.

Well, as I was saying, he set up a little workshop to make the perfect camera. He said to me, "With these glasses of mine I can see with something like clarity, Doctor. But people are liars, inveterate liars unto themselves. The sensitised plate tells the truth—the camera does not lie. Wait, and I will make you a lens that will photograph your very soul!"

Always of a contentious habit—I think I mentioned that I belong to the good old Edinburgh school—I said to him, "Man, you are out of your wits. You're fey. Define me 'soul,' is all I ask. What is it? Where is it? Have you ever seen a soul? If so, draw me a bit diagram. Get yourself a wee studio and pull your black velvet over your head and make pictures of young ladies holding bunches of wax grapes. Let me look after your chest. The soul is beyond my jurisdiction—and yours, too."

Manxman said, "Have it your way. Edinburgh doctors have no souls—only characters. But two weeks hence I will show you a photograph of yourself as you *are*. You wait and see!"

So I said to him, "Manxman, I am an old-fashioned pragmatist. The great M'Kechnie—"

He cut me off short with, "Damn the great M'Kechnie! Come back in ten days, all nice and ready to sit for your portrait, and I'll show you what you really *are*."

So I came back—apart from professional visits—and there he was with his camera all mounted—a thing like a concertina on a tripod. What seemed to be the basic part of the apparatus was,

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let us say, about the size of half of the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopedia.* Out in front protruded something like an exaggerated tulip-vase, but covered with washleather. Above, the kind of aperture-sight they used to have on machine-guns. A formidable apparatus, sir.

To cut a long story short, Manxman set me in a chair, told me to relax—which I did—and pressed a little jigger at the end of a tube. Then he took out the plate and ran with it into his dark-room, grinning like an ape . . .

I waited an hour, and he came out with the monstrosity I've just shown you, saying, " This is your*self*! "

I looked at it and said, " There is something wrong with your glasses, my friend. This is neither me nor anybody else. First, let me give you a sedative. Then we'll see a reliable optician." But he persisted that he had photographed my innermost soul.

I said to him, " Man, I would not own such a soul, innermost or outermost—although I will concede that the outlines are clear."

He called me a fool, and smashed the plate—they used to be made of glass in those days—but I kept that print as a curio, and did my professional duty by him with my little ear-trumpet. Now, no doubt, an electrocardiogram of poor Manxman would come out like boom and depression or, say, a map of the Himalayas. He was not in elegant shape, poor fellow.

He would not see me again for a long time. But I heard of him. It was a transvaluation of values, then. I was in general practice in Bentinck Street. Manxman had a studio in Bond Street. I was making my way, in my lazy way; but he was the talk of the town. He was in the newspapers. There was an article about him in *The Westminster Gazette* in which he was described as " the mirror of the soul," and another in *The Globe* that represented him as a veritable Svengali and spoke of his " Enchanted Camera."

For a little while he was extremely fashionable. You know how it is? A woman will lap up your flattery and inhale your incense as a matter of course—I don't say without pleasure—but at the back of her mind lies the unspoken question: What does he really think of me? It became the vogue for Society ladies to consult Manxman as to the true appearance of their hidden hearts. None of these pictures was published in the illustrated magazines. Most of them were destroyed, I believe.

Yet it may be that Manxman did his modicum of good—as much as is vouchsafed. To tell you the truth, I believe some of these sitters of his gloated over Manxman's distortions of them. He was responsible for a certain change of expression

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in Society in 1903. He invented the drooped eyelid and replaced the prim mouth with the snarl and the leer. Always, some little bit of the face was in the wrong place—as, I repeat, the leer, the snarl, the sneer, the look of illicit desire curiously combined with disdain and self-hate. He was, I suppose, the progenitor of what they used to call the " vamp."

I ran into him in a tailor's shop in Savile Row—I allowed myself two good suits per annum, and was getting myself fitted for what they used to call a body coat, in other words, a professional frock-coat. He was feeling the finest facecloth in jet black, and wore a peculiar kind of jacket suit that buttoned up to the sternum, where it opened to reveal a black silk waistcoat with peculiar little lapels.

His linen, now, was white as driven snow, and he wore a cravat of the finest satin, not tied but held in place by a silver ring set with an enormous cat's-eye. His beard and his hair were trimmed. He must have been a difficult subject for a tailor to fit, because he seemed to stoop more than ever. His complexion was like lead. I said to myself, " Oho, my friend, the cardiac will not be denied! "

But I said to him, " How goes it, Manxman? I hear you're photographing souls at last."

" So I am, Doctor," said he. " And where are you these days?"

I said, " In practice in Bentinck Street."

He became slightly condescending then, because Bentinck Street was to Harley Street—or even Queen Anne Street—a species of poor relation.

Manxman said, " I have my studio in Bond Street, and my chambers above."

He looked at me with all the arrogance in the world magnified to satanic proportions through those eyeglasses of his, so that I understood why he had received such diabolic publicity: one felt that the miserable fellow was stooping to swoop and that there were bat's wings tucked away where his scapulae—or, as the vulgar put it, shoulder-blades—should have been. At any moment he might give a great flap and carry you off to a mountain top, and invite you to cast yourself down, et cetera.

But all he said was, " Doctor, I owe you for four visits at three and sixpence a time. That makes fourteen shillings. Allow me to settle—" and paid into my hand a golden half-sovereign and two half-crowns. I gave him a shilling change, which he put up in a leather purse shaped like a saddle, and said, " Let us go and have tea at Bunter's."

Having no calls until evening, I went with him. Bunter's used to be the finest teashop in the world. Ah me, those were the days! But why should I repine? Even if I had my youth and

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appetite, could I bring old times back? To proceed: I ordered finnan haddie seethed in milk, with a poached egg to top it off, and hot buttered crumpets. Manxman had a cup of tea and a biscuit. He said, with some irritation, " Did you have no lunch, Doctor? "

I told him, yes, certainly, a light lunch: a potato soup and a couple of veal cutlets, merely. But I would make up for it at dinner-time.

" I didn't know G.Ps. in Bentinck Street did themselves so well," says he, looking askew at me—silk hat and all.

" A silk hat, my friend, is a thing to keep a stethoscope in. Anyway, with my practice and my natural inclination to indolence, I should most likely be renewing my wardrobe off the hook in Whitechapel. Only I have come into a little inheritance."

" Yes," says Manxman, " it was written all over your face. You were born idle and greedy and vicious and vain. Couldn't you see it in the photograph I took of you? "

" I did not regard it," I tell him, mopping up the last of the yolk of the egg with the residue of the last crumpet. " I keep the picture, yes. But believe me, Manxman, your popularity is nothing but a fad. It will pass. It must pass. One good cold blast will kill it. To make hay while the sun shines is every man's prerogative.

" Just now people are rich and silly. A day will come when they'll say, ' Why should I pay this fellow Manxman fifty guineas for what I could get for twopence in the Hall of Mirrors on Hampstead Heath? ' Save your money, man; salt it down; wear a velveteen jacket like any other photographer, and don't go squandering ten guineas on a Savile Row suit! "

But he was paying little attention to me. He kept flipping open and snapping shut a fine gold watch, and looking uneasily in the direction of the door.

" Expecting somebody? " I ask him.

He says, " To be frank, a lady. A very beautiful lady. I hope to marry her, Doctor."

I shuddered, I will confess, at the thought of what poor Manxman might consider beautiful; but he goes on, rummaging in his wallet, " The only beautiful woman these eyes have ever seen, Doctor. Here is a picture of her—head and shoulders. I took it myself."

And he hands me, with a certain reverence, one of those little photographs that used to be known, I believe, as cartes de visite: they used to put them out by the thousand and sell them, so much a piece—Sarah Bernhardt, Ellen Terry, Eleanora Duse, and what have you. Happy days when we were young, eh?

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I hesitate, you understand, to look at this picture. A man, distorted, is bad enough; but to the male eye a woman, distorted, is ten times worse.

Then you can imagine my surprise when I see the portrayal of a kind of angel—not unlike George du Maurier's Trilby—symmetrical, perfect, sublime! "What? Are you trying to tell me that this lovely woman entertains any idea of marrying the likes of you?" I ask him.

And Manxman, with a smug smile, says, "We are engaged. Aha, that shakes you, does it? Yes, sir, we are engaged to be married. And she worships the very ground that I tread on. Jealous?"

"To put it mildly, astounded," I tell this miserable fellow for whom—in parenthesis—I have conceived a certain distaste, all pity spent.

"She will be here any moment," says he, squinting at his loud gold watch. "Have another cup of tea. Let's order a fresh pot. And muffins—Martha loves muffins. . . Hey there!" he shouts, like the pilot of a boat in a fog. "Fresh tea, hot and strong! And muffins, plenty of muffins!" Then, "Keep calm, Doctor—here she comes."

I ask him, "Here who comes?"

"My Martha."

I need scarcely tell you that I am ready to spring out of my chair like a jack-in-the-box; but I pull down my cuffs and rise like a gentleman to greet this peerless beauty whose photograph lies before me on the table. And what do I see?

Heaven help us, I have no words for it! Say, everything the photograph was not. The very thought of it gives me a funny turn. She was all out of place, let us put it like that. As a medical man I could give you some reasons for her weird malformation; but not all. There is no use going into details. She was a horror.

So be it. The tea and the muffins came, and I civilly lifted that picture out of the way—whereupon this Martha gives out a little cry and says to me, "Oh, Dr. Hilton-Joyce, has that wicked man been showing you my portrait? Do you think he does me justice?"

What can I say? I can only say, "I am no judge of these matters, ma'am, but it is a very pretty picture."

"Don't you think Arthur is a fine-looking man?" she asks me.

I say, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. I am only a dry medical man of the old Edinburgh school."

She gushes, this appalling woman, like that geyser they call Old Reliable, "Oh, make him, Doctor—make him take a photo

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of himself for me to carry. Oh please, dear Doctor, please!"

Now a child of ten can see that Manxman has a sort of double-barrelled vanity: he is vain of himself, and vain of his low opinion of himself. In between the two, such a fellow visualises a species of god—be it Apollo, be it Vulcan; it does not matter.

So when he hesitates, I put in my oar and I say, "Come on now, Manxman. You claim to have photographed other people's souls. Play the man, and let us have a glimpse of your own."

You see, he really had come to believe in his own chicanery, miserable fellow, and took his spiritualistic photograph-taking very seriously, this lens-grinder with dust in his eyes.

But on my challenge, with Martha clinging to his arm, he says, "Very well, and so I will. I've never done it before, but there must be a first time for everything. And if it will give you pleasure, Martha, I'll take a cabinet photograph of myself at about eight feet. No gig-lamps—" by which, of course, he meant spectacles —"I can extend the cord and rig the camera, my dear, and by the middle of tomorrow I'll have a fine print for you to put in a silver frame."

This infatuated and malformed, but good-hearted and affectionate woman, holding a buttered muffin in one hand, pinched his cheek with the other, and said, "You're so good! And will you bring out your soul?"

"Naturally," says he.

Beauty, et cetera, are in the eye of the beholder . . . Oh aye, I will grant you that. But did anybody ever stop to consider the nature of the eye, and the beholder?

In a scientific way I was, in a manner of speaking, interested. This creature Manxman had managed, with his wonky goggles and his queer lenses, to turn Society beauties into harpies, and statesmen into gargoyles. You have seen what he did with me—it made you sick to look at it, did it not? So it did me. Yet, on the other hand, his queer eyes and his queer camera, brought to bear on that intolerably contorted Martha of his, had thrown up the picture of a beauty.

I was exceedingly curious—curiosity having got the upper hand of sympathy—to observe what this little monster would make of himself. So I made an appointment with him for the following afternoon, saying that I wanted to examine his chest, anyway.

I turned up at three with my little black bag, and the housekeeper's husband says to me, "Doctor, thank God you've come—Mr. Manxman is taken bad. I'll let you in."

And there was Manxman, propped up on pillows, with a stone hot-water bottle at his feet. I say to him, "Bear up, man, and let's have a listen at your silly old chest." But I can

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see in his face that he is done for. "Have you been overdoing it, or what has upset you?"

He says in a faint voice, "You encouraged her, you. You know I could photograph the actual person with my camera, although you pretend and pretend and pretend. . . I never wanted an image of myself. But that woman asked for it, and you bolstered her up, curse you!"

I am an old-fashioned Edinburgh man, and I don't believe in curses, so I tell him plainly, "Be calm, you fool, and I'll give you a dose of something that will be good for what ails you. Meanwhile, what happened to you? You were to take your own picture. You know, photograph your true likeness. What's to do with it? Where have you hid it? I don't hold with your souls and your spirits and your images, Manxman, but I am curious to know how you saw yourself through those queer goggles and that peculiar lens."

It is what they call patter, because while I am administering certain necessary drugs I am listening as his breath comes shorter, and he says, "You never believed, but I know. No time to discuss now. Oh, why did you let me take a picture of myself?"

I tell him, "Man, a man who is afraid of himself is no man. Let's have a look at the photograph."

"It's under the pillow," he says, "but you mustn't show it to *her*."

Oh well, I feel under the pillow and fish out the photograph of something which was truly frightening. The face was not so much hairy as bristly, and the eyes were bulgy and protuberant in the wrong direction. There were no visible ears, but there was a sort of nose—or rather, proboscis. It was impossible to associate this thing with humanity.

I had to look twice before a certain thought struck me, and I asked, "Did you have your glasses on, Manxman, when you took this photograph?"

"Naturally not. I arranged the camera and sat back. My glasses would throw back the light, so I took them off. Believe me, I know how to make people sit, and so I sat for my own portrait while I pressed the trigger. And there is my soul—oh dear me!"

I asked, "At what distance, when you took your glasses off?"

"Oh, between eight and ten feet."

Then I began to laugh, looking at the photograph, and I said, "Why, you blind booby, don't you know what you've done? It's as simple as ABC.

"Listen to me carefully. Without your glasses on, you got yourself out of alignment and, very simply, took a distorted

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picture of the head of a common housefly. So cheer up and try it again."

But I was talking into space; Manxman would never try anything again . . .

Oh dear, this was a long time ago, and the mist gives me the creeps. With your kind permission, I'll give you a shakedown by the fire, and bid you good night. © Gerald Kersh 1960

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CASTLES IN THE SAND

There was a man who made wonderful sculptures in the damp sand: he could do mermaids and dolphins, and castles and sailing-ships and battle-cruisers, with burnt-out match-sticks for guns . . . Once, after watching him for a long while as he made a low-relief picture of the Shields Town Hall—copying it from a very grubby postcard—he suddenly turned to me and asked me what I would like him to make.

"What? For me?" I asked, incredulous.

He didn't reply, so I said quickly:

"Make me a Music Hall, like the Empire."

He gave me an old-fashioned look.

"You would have to ask for something difficult, wouldn't you?" he said gruffly. I didn't know whether he was angry or not. But he made me a theatre, with hanging curtains, and tiers of boxes at the sides. There were little shells for footlights—he asked me to go and collect them myself. And in the scooped-out proscenium there was a fairy castle and a bridge and trees made of seaweed—I got that for him too—and a paper figure of myself sitting in one of the boxes, eating an ice-cream cornet. Then he made a little lake among the trees with a big blue mussell-shell filled with sea-water. When he had finished it all by placing a tiny celluloid swan on the lake he turned to me and said:

"What do they call you, hinney?"

I told him, and he wrote underneath in beautiful curling script:

"This belongs to James Falconer Kirkup."

He made a fine flourish under my name, and added the date. I was speechless. He got up, picked up his capful of pennies and went away, and I never saw him again . . . I sat there beside it until the sea came in, and watched the first wave wash it all away, leaving the sand smooth and empty, as if all that pleasure and wonder had never been.

But I knew I should never forget that man, and the happiness he gave me. He did not know it, but it was my sixth birthday.

JAMES KIRKUP, *The Only Child*

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Alcoholic Goat

BY JOHN STEINBECK

LONDON, *July* 9, 1943—His name is Wing Commander William Goat, D.S.O., and he is old and honoured, and, some say, in iniquity. But when he joined the R.A.F. wing two years ago he was just able to totter about on long and knobby legs.

For a long time he was treated like any other recruit—kicked about, ignored, and at times cursed. But gradually his abilities began to be apparent. He is very good luck to have about. When he is near, his wing has good fortune and good hunting. Gradually his horns, along with his talents, developed, until now his rank and his decorations are painted on his horns in brilliant colours and he carries himself with a shambling strut.

He will eat nearly everything. No party nor any review is complete without him. At one party, being left alone for a few moments, it is reported that he ate two hundred sandwiches, three cakes, the arrangements for piano and flute of *Pomp and Circumstance*, drank half a bowl of punch, and then walked jauntily among the dancers, belching slightly and regarding a certain lieutenant's wife, who shall be nameless, with a lustful eye.

He has the slightly bilious look of the military of the higher brackets. Being an air-goat, he has rather unique habits. If you bring an oxygen bottle into view, he rushes to it and demands it. He puts his whole mouth over the outlet and then, as you turn the valve, he gently relaxes, grunting happily, and his sides fill out

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until he nearly bursts. Just before he bursts he lets go of the nozzle and collapses slowly, but the energy he takes from the oxygen makes him leap into the air and engage imaginary goats in horny combat.

He also loves the glycol cooling fluid which is used in the engines of the Typhoons. For hours he will stand under the barrels, licking the drips from the spouts.

He has the confidence of his men. Once when it was required that his wing change its base of operations quickly, he was left behind, for in those days it was not known how important he was. At the new base the men were nervous and irritable, fearful and almost mutinous. Finally, when it was seen that they would not relax, a special plane had to be sent to pick up the wing commander and transport him to the new base.

Once he arrived, everything settled down. The Typhoons had four kills within twenty-four hours. The nervous tension went out of the air, the food got better as the cook ceased brooding, and a number of stomach complaints disappeared immediately.

Wing Commander Goat lives in a small house behind the Operations Room. His name and honours are painted over the door. It is very good luck to go to him and stroke his sides and rub his horns before going out on operations. He does not go out on operations himself. There is not room in the Typhoons for him, but if it were possible to squeeze him in he would be taken, and then heaven knows what great action might not take place.

This goat has only one truly bad habit. He loves beer, and furthermore is able to absorb it in such quantities that even the mild, nearly non-alcoholic English beer can make him tipsy. In spite of orders to the contrary he is able to seek out the evil companions who will give him beer.

Once inebriated, he is prone to wander about sneering. He sneers at the American Army Air Force, he sneers at the Labour party, and once he sneered at Mr. Churchill. The sneer is probably inherent in the beer, since punch has quite a different effect on him.

In appearance this goat is not impressive. He has a shabby, pinkish fur and a cold, fishlike eye; his legs are not straight, in fact he is slightly knock-kneed. He carries his head high, and his horns, painted in brilliant red and blue, more than offset any physical oddness. In every way, he is a military figure. He is magnificent on parade.

Eventually he will be given a crypt in the Air Ministry and will die in good time of that military ailment, cirrhosis of the liver. He will be buried with full military honours.

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★ *Molten lava—steam—grey ash! So vivid is this dramatic trek in the path of an earthquake in New Guinea that the reader shares, shoulder to shoulder, this desperate retreat from angry craters and the very jaws of death, unaware that this is not fact but fiction: an extract from Cleary's forthcoming novel . . .*

NORTH FROM THURSDAY

BY JON CLEARY

THE volcano was still cracking and rumbling, blowing out smoke, dust, and rocks, when the trek began half an hour later. Lava was now welling out of the crater in a great creeping wave; where Vaikaka had stood there was now only a red-grey mass of smoking living earth.

The wind still came from the west, blowing the smoke and dust away in a cloud that went diagonally up the sky. The sun had now climbed till it was above the cloud, a sullen red eye that added to the threat of further disaster. Kundavi was in bright sunshine, beyond the angle of the shadow cast by the cloud, but the country through which the party had to pass was darkened as by a storm.

The stench of the crater still hung over the valley, and occasionally as the wind lapsed for a moment there would be a light rain of ashes falling on Kundavi.

Jack Bermingham and Frank Rossi, the cadet patrol officer, led the way into the gorges. With them went Mary Bermingham, Jack's wife, and their children; then came Dr. Macy, with his young son, Harry, leading his cassowary, and the Czech doctor, Traxal. The Assistant District Officer, Roy Narvo, brought up the rear and with him were Elisabeth Palyardi, the Czech girl, Father Shawn, Sister Duggan, and Sergeant Beraki.

Immediately in front of them were the prisoners from the stockade carrying the patients from the hospital. Between the whites at the rear and those in front stretched a long line of frightened natives, over four hundred of them.

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Narvo stopped at the top of the path that led down into the gorge and looked back at the patrol post. In the bright sunlight it looked as spick and span as ever, except for the snow of ash that lay over everything. But no one moved across the parade ground nor between the lines of huts; there was no singing from houseboys hanging out the washing nor from old women chopping the grass; no police boys stood beneath the flagpole nor did the pole carry a flag. No one might move nor sing nor chop the grass nor raise the flag ever again in Kundavi. Narvo had built it out of the wilderness and the wilderness might take it back. Three years of his life had gone into this post and all he had to show for it were the lines on his face and the brittle respect and loyalty of the natives now filing ahead of him down into the gorges.

"Breaks your heart, doesn't it?" said Father Mike Shawn.

"It may survive, Roy," Elisabeth said to Narvo. "You may come back here."

The A.D.O. shook his head. "Kundavi is finished. The airstrip gone, the land route in here—God knows what's happened to that. We'll find out soon enough. No, if they ever open up another post in this area, it won't be at Kundavi. We'll have to find another spot where they can put a plane down. You'd better say good-bye to Kundavi, Mike."

Father Shawn nodded, took one last long look around the post, looked up the road towards the mission, blessed himself, and turned quickly and went down the path into the gorge.

Narvo and Elisabeth walked down the path together. Below them the natives had begun to sing, a soft mournful chant that came up out of the gorge like a lament. The words, unintelligible to Elisabeth, floated up past them, up over the silent and deserted post and the mission, to die against the tangled slope of the mountain against which Kundavi was built. It was singing that had no echoes.

The long line of refugees stretched down the twisting path into the gorge. They were walking in single file and the line was long enough; but it seemed to grow longer the farther it went down into the gorge. Then Narvo saw the other lines of natives coming down the steep slopes to join the Kundavi line halfway down the gorge.

"Oh, Christ," Narvo said, and Father Shawn stopped and looked back. "I'm not swearing, Mike. Maybe I'm asking for help. Look!"

Father Shawn looked down the gorge, then along it where it cut below the slope of the southern ranges. For perhaps two or three miles on this side of the river the ranges were covered only with a fine ash: then they turned sharply north-east and that was where they showed the full effect of the blast. The northern side of the river had got the full force of the eruption, and it would be a miracle if anyone had survived there. But here on the southern side of the river, east of Kundavi, people were still alive and now they were coming down to join the march out to safety.

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"There must be a couple of thousand of them!" Father Shawn exclaimed, and looked back up the path at Narvo. "What are you going to do, Roy? How are you going to feed them? How are you going to stop them from drinking the water on the way out?"

"Here's your chance to be a saint, Mike," said Narvo, not unkindly, still staring down along the gorge. "If your prayers are answered, I'll personally recommend you for canonisation.

"Chuff off ahead, will you, Mike, and see they get the word they're not to touch the river or any springs for drinking water. Tell Frank Rossi he'd better drop halfway back along the line just to keep an eye on them. Jack can continue leading the way."

The natives from the mountain villages were still coming down into the gorge as Narvo and Elisabeth reached the spot where the newcomers were joining the trek.

Sister Duggan was waiting there with the hospital patients and their prisoner carriers.

"Any burn cases among this new lot?" Narvo asked.

"None that I can see." Duggan had posted herself where she could inspect every newcomer as he went past her. Each of the natives smiled at her as he passed by, but Duggan was not wearing out her face muscles in reply—she could have been the stern matron of a large school inspecting her pupils for measles. "They haven't brought much food with them, Roy. And no water at all."

"Then that's what Goroka has got to send us right away."

Narvo turned to call Beraki. But the sergeant was already standing right beside his Kiap; and Narvo felt a glow of affection for the proud smug police boy. This man's loyalty was not brittle, nor was there any treachery in him. He was arrogant and vain, but he was loyal. "Beraki, get up to Mr. Rossi and tell him to radio in to Goroka. We want water dropped from the aeroplane to us. As much as they can send. Quick!"

Beraki stepped back, snapped a salute, and was gone at a swift run down the path, yelling at the natives to make way for him, that he was carrying a message for the Kiap and he would hurl anyone into the river who did not let him past.

The natives were still coming down the steep slope into the gorge. Narvo turned and looked back up at the volcano. It was still coughing up molten rock, and the lava flow was well down the mountainside now. Ash and pumice dust were floating down into the gorge, coating everyone thickly. As the natives filed farther down into the gorge, into the mist above the river, the ash and dust turned to a fine grey mud. The wind had dropped and the smoke and dust from the crater were spreading.

The roar of the river now drowned out the crack and rumble of the volcano, but occasionally the earth would shudder. The long line of natives would suddenly break up and scatter as rocks and slices of earth slid down across the path. Miraculously no one had yet been hit.

"You'd better go on ahead," Narvo said to Elisabeth. "I'll

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stay here with Duggan till the last of these kanakas come down."

"No," she said, and looked up at him with frank regard and affection. If she was in love with him at that moment, she did not query it: now was not the time for giving her heart but only her loyalty. She had begun to recognise how much this man depended upon and was sustained by loyalty. "I'd rather stay with you."

Even though he knew Duggan was watching them closely, he put out his hand and took Elisabeth's. "You're going to stay with me till the end of this trek." Then he looked at Duggan and grinned. "I'm no longer against women, Duggan."

"Did it take a volcano to bring that about?" said Duggan, then smiled at Elisabeth, the dust coating her teeth but not diminishing the warmth of her smile. "You could do worse, Elisabeth. I've never admitted it before, but he's not a bad bloke."

Then at last no more natives were coming down from the slopes into the gorge. The prisoners picked up the patients and began to move on.

Up at the head of the long column, now almost two miles ahead of Narvo, Bermingham said, "I don't like the look of that up there."

Traxal, who had been walking with his head bent, looked up. Ahead of them the gorge widened out slightly. The trail, hidden beneath ash and pumice dust but marked by the ash-blooming bushes that grew alongside it, ran along the southern side of the river. Two hundred yards ahead the river turned sharply north, and on the opposite side of the river from the trail a sheer cliff rose hundreds of feet up the side of the mountain.

The top of the cliff seemed to be smoking and, even as Traxal watched, what looked like a section of it fell off. It dropped like a meteor, smoke streaming behind it, and hit the river in a fountain of steam.

"It's lava!" Macy exclaimed, horrified. "How the hell did that get so far so quickly?"

"I dunno." Bermingham had stopped, and gradually the long line behind him slowed, then came to a halt. The natives had been singing softly, the sound only a faint murmur against the roar of the river, but now the singing died away. The long, dark file, strung along the bottom of the gorge like an immense snake, stood and watched the lava come over the edge of the cliff, a border of red bushes whose flowers fell even as they bloomed. "Unless there is another crater in the mountain farther down. It might have been missed because of the smoke. Anyhow, I don't like the look of it, my word I don't."

The lava now rimmed the entire top of the cliff. It glowed against the dark cloud that covered the sky. Sections of it were falling off and coming down in plumes of smoke to hit the river and disappear in explosions of steam.

"What are we going to do?" Bernice Macy almost screamed to her husband. "We can't stay here!"

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"We can't turn back, either," said Macy, and looked at Bermingham. "We can get through, Jack, but what about the others at the back?"

The natives were moving restlessly, edging forward along the trail, then pulling back, wanting to go on but afraid to. Harry had buried the cassowary's head against his chest and was stroking it and talking to it, but the bird was trembling and would have fled if Harry had not been holding it so tightly. Mary Bermingham had the younger child in a net bag slung from her head and carried on her back; the trek, the baby in her belly, and fear had taken their toll of her. Bermingham was carrying the older child on his shoulders, and for some time he had been looking anxiously at his wife.

"I think you all better go on," he said. "I'll stay here with Mary and we'll hurry the kanakas along. We gotta keep in mind that Roy and the others are right at the end of this string."

"I'll stay," Traxal said suddenly. "They need you to show them the way, Jack."

Bermingham was surprised, but he did not argue. The lava was now falling steadily over the cliff. Steam was rising from the river, thickening the mist till the cliff itself was slowly being obscured. It would not be long before the river was boiling, before it overflowed as it was dammed up by the falling lava. There was no time to argue with Traxal, nor to ponder his reason for volunteering. Bermingham, after a life of danger, misfortune, and sometimes miraculous good luck, took things as they came. A large chunk of lava fell with a loud hiss into the river.

"Righto," Bermingham said. "Keep 'em moving quick. Don't forget that Roy's the last man in this line."

"I shan't forget," said Traxal, flat-voiced.

Then Macy all at once let go of Bernice, whom he had been helping along the rougher sections of the trail, and stepped up to Mary and took the child from the net bag on her back. Then he looked at Bernice. "I think Mary could do with some help, darling. She's just about done in."

Bernice hesitated, and Bermingham waited for her to refuse. Then she moved forward and took Mary by the arm. The little native woman leaned shyly away, looking at her husband for reassurance. Bermingham nodded at both women, reassuring one and thanking the other, then he turned and led the way along the trail past the thickening cauldron of steam.

Traxal watched them go, wondering why he had volunteered to stay here. It had been an involuntary gesture, the words out of his mouth before he had realised what he was saying. But there was no time to wonder about it now. The natives were going by him at a steady shambling run, old people helped by the young, children caught up and carried like so many black sacks. He yelled at them to hurry, his voice only a thin bleat against the roar of the river and the hiss of the lava as it plunged into the water.

The cliff now was hidden as if behind a red smoking waterfall.

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Lava fell steadily and the gorge was just a deep basin of whirling clouds of steam through which the falling lava glowed. The natives went stumbling past, some of them muttering but most of them in silence, and disappeared into the steam that enveloped them like a giant swirling curtain. The mist of steam spread slowly along the gorge, and with it came the smell of the lava, pungent and sickening. The steam came creeping up on Traxal, warm and clammy, and moved on past him.

All he could see now were the natives who passed immediately in front of him. They were holding hands, each man following the man in front of him, running blindly into the mist; they went past like dark figures in a dream, suspended between living and dying, unable to know what lay ahead of them but afraid to turn back.

The mist of steam glowed pinkly as the lava continued to fall: it came down like falling strips of fire behind a window of frosted glass. And the hissing now seemed almost as loud as the roar of the tumbling water.

Traxal stood there, the ash and dust on him turning to watery mud and his clothes becoming drenched, and lost all sense of time. There was something Walpurgian about the scene: he would not have been startled if witches had appeared. The natives came and went in the mist of the steam, none distinguishable from another, dark, faceless wraiths running, for all he knew, in a circle; and gradually the steam itself grew warmer, thickening till it was almost like spray, and the gorge filled with heat. There was a scream from somewhere up ahead and the line of running natives faltered momentarily; then the running line went on and Traxal stayed where he was, knowing there was nothing he could do. If someone had missed his step and plunged into the river, he was already dead.

Then Rossi and Father Shawn and Sergeant Beraki came up, and a moment later the first of the patients was carried by. The two white men and the police sergeant stepped off the path and stood by Traxal. No one said a word till the last of the patients had disappeared into the mist, and Narvo, Elisabeth, and Duggan had come up.

The heat in the gorge now was intense. The cliff beyond the swirl of steam was just a red glow; it was as if they stood across the river from the open doors of a huge furnace. The very air, thick with steam, seemed to be boiling; as they breathed, it scalded their lungs and made them gasp. The roar of the river had disappeared now; there was only the hissing, and a crackling and popping sound as the lava fell. The burning smell was almost as overpowering as a gas.

Narvo took Elisabeth's hand, and the others fell into place behind. Traxal found himself at the rear. Then he saw Sergeant Beraki fall in behind him. Without hesitation he put out his hand, the first he had ever offered to a black man, and Beraki took it. Then the human chain began to move forward.

It moved slowly because the trail had now disappeared. They

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walked into the steam, Narvo feeling his way with the long stick he carried. Traxal had once seen children from an orphanage for the blind walking in the same shuffling crocodile; but they had been chattering and laughing, walking with blind confidence in their leader. There was no chattering or laughing here in this a silence of fear.

The river at times sounded right below their feet, as if they were walking along the very edge of the bank; once Traxal flinched as hot water splashed on him, and behind him Beraki uttered a short gasp. Then Traxal felt the hot water seeping into his boots and for a moment he thought he had stepped off into the river. He cried out in Czech, but he would never know whether he had cursed or prayed or shouted just an animal cry of despair.

Then he felt Father Shawn in front of him jerk him abruptly to the right. He slipped in the mud of ash and pumice dust; and his wet and slippery hand almost lost its hold on the priest's. Behind him Beraki, barefooted in the hot, watery mud, was making no sound; but his big hand was a vice on Traxal's.

Then Father Shawn's grip tightened, and Traxal was pulled away from the creeping scalding water of the overflowing river. The mist of steam suddenly thinned, and the world was created all over again. Shapes pressed against the gaze like sweet pains; and the light, gloomy though it was, was almost like a benediction.

A burnt and shattered tree had a beauty that was spurious but no less valuable to those that saw it; the gorge under its crust of ash and pumice dust could not have been more luxuriant.

Father Shawn turned and looked back over his shoulder, his thin scarred face ugly with sweat and mud; but to Traxal it was almost the face of a stranger, a stranger he could love. In turn he looked back at Beraki, and when he dropped the black man's hand he did so reluctantly, as if he was saying good-bye to a friend. The chain of people had been bound by something stronger than friendship, by the primitive urge to survive.

Narvo said something to Elisabeth, and the talk ran down the line. Someone laughed, not with humour but with relief; and they hurried on and soon caught up with the last of the natives. They did not look back at the cliff and the lava that fell from it in a fiery cascade.

The gorge widened out. The mist and steam and the hissing of the lava were behind them, and even the acrid smell of burning had faded till it was more just a memory in the nostrils than an irritation and a threat.

They were in a shallow valley now that ran down gently to a distant spur of the ranges; a valley that Traxal, with a shock, remembered as being lush and green. There had been native gardens here, and villages on the ridges that ran out from the slopes on either side. Clumps of trees had grown along the banks of the river, and bamboo had waved like the pennants of an

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invisible army in the lee of the ridges. Now there was only a dead world.

The long dark line of refugees stretched down the floor of the grey devastated valley, the only moving living thing in the whole awful landscape. Ash and pumice dust and rocks of solidified lava had turned the valley into a crater of the moon; one looked up towards the smoking sky and expected to see the Earth. The gardens were a desert of grey dust: they grew only patches of black rock. The villages on the ridges had been flattened; in one or two places a stake in a fence remained standing, like the futilely defiant spear of a dead native.

Trees had been stripped of leaves and branches; some trunks still stood, like remnants of a petrified forest. Rocks were embedded in the tree trunks; a possum, devoid of flesh and fur, was a dark pattern against a boulder. Dust rose from the feet of the trampling line of refugees and caught by the wind rose in spiralling ghosts to add to the unearthly impression of the desolate scene.

Traxal, staring ahead, saw the curve in the line and wondered what caused it. It took him twenty minutes to reach the spot. Narvo, who had gone ahead, was waiting for him. They stood on the edge of a native garden, round which the natives walked in a wide loop as if devils grew there.

Narvo pointed across to the cluster of grey figures that seemed to be asleep among the domes of kau-kau . . .

Rossi was staring back the way they had come, to the volcano crouched like a red-jawed beast behind its cover of smoke. From here they could plainly see the crater. They were in direct line from it; the middle of the blast must have passed right over where they stood. The crater was still spewing lava, and occasionally there would be a flare-up of flame; the lava would glow fiercely and the smoke would darken and thicken.

The whole of the sky now was stained by the smoke and dust. The valley was bathed in a light that had the softness and the tint of eternity that Rossi had seen in cathedrals when the sun struck through the windows from the west. We are not going to make this, he thought.

"Frank!"

Rossi started, realising that Narvo had been calling to him for some moments.

"Frank, did you get through to Goroka about the water?"

"They were going out to collect the containers right away," Rossi said, recovering himself, throwing off his despair and trying to think of survival. "They weren't sure, either, about how many parachutes they had."

"We'll move on to the end of the valley and wait there," Narvo said. "It will be easier for dropping."

"What if the mountain blows again?" Rossi said, unable to forget it. "We're right in its path."

"Then we shan't need the water," said Narvo, and Elisabeth wondered if he spoke with bravado or was indeed so in control of

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himself and his fears that he could make a statement that was a fact and not a macabre joke.

They moved on through the valley. The day was warm and Elisabeth could feel the dust turning to mud beneath her eyes and in the hollow of her throat where the perspiration ran. Her lips were closed tight against the insidious dust that was trying to find its way into her body, but her nose was slowly becoming blocked and breathing was difficult.

Her hands and arms wore long gloves of fine ash, and the legs that had been bare when she had begun the march were now covered to the tops of her thighs, even beneath her skirt, with stockings of grey dust. She could feel the dust finding its way all over her, like the soft touch of a seducer who would eventually smother her. She could bear the intrusion of the dust into her person, she knew, if only her thirst did not become worse.

But it did, and so did that of the natives. Three times Narvo had to fire his pistol as men broke from the long file and ran across to the river; the natives hesitated and finally turned back and rejoined the long trudging line. On the third occasion of this attempted break to drink from the river, Narvo waited for Traxal to come up to him.

"What about the river?" he asked. "Do you think it would be dangerous for them to drink from it?"

"I have no way of telling," Traxal said. "Unless you want to delegate a guinea pig. But I should not like to risk it myself. The water is running swiftly enough, but I don't think it has come far enough to clear itself. It must contain a lot of ash and pumice dust, and less than a mile back it has come over all that lava. I'd rather go thirsty for a while."

"You'd better dole some of that water in the bags out to the patients," Narvo said. "And you and Duggan can have a mouthful each."

"Why the favouritism?"

"You're a doctor. I may have to keep you alive longer than anyone else, just to save myself."

Narvo halted two of the carriers who were carrying one of the waterbags on a pole between them. The patients were put down in the dust, and Duggan went along them, giving each half a cup of water. The carriers stood by, sullen and envious, but Narvo ignored them.

Then Duggan stood up at the end of the line of patients. "That's the lot."

"Now it's your turn," Narvo said. "Half a cup."

Duggan hesitated, then she wiped out the cup, ran water into it from the bag and drank. She turned and offered the cup to Elisabeth.

"No," Narvo said, and both Duggan and Elisabeth looked at him in surprise: his voice was impersonal but authoritative. "Peter has half a cup. But that's all. No one else drinks till the plane comes."

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Traxal took the cup, raised it in salute to Narvo and drank. The carriers watched in silence the pantomime between the whites: they did not understand a word that had been spoken, but every gesture had been intelligible. Narvo made no attempt to apologise or explain to Elisabeth why he had refused her a drink, and she felt resentful. Then she found herself watching the carriers. The sullenness died out of their faces; enlightenment relaxed their expressions. They watched Traxal hand the cup back to Duggan, who wiped it and put it away.

The carriers looked at Narvo and Elisabeth, the two whites who hadn't drunk, and without a word they bent and picked up their burdens and moved on, still envious but no longer sullen and angry.

Then Elisabeth felt her own resentment at Narvo disappear. And found herself admiring him. By the single gesture of refusing her the drink, he had killed at birth any rebellion the natives might have felt. She looked along the seemingly interminable line of natives stretching down to the end of the valley, and tried to imagine what would have happened if they had known that at the rear of the procession the whites were drinking what water was available. And knew that at this moment she might already have been dead.

" Roy," she said through a throat dry and swollen with thirst, " I am glad you stopped me from taking that drink."

" You'll all get a drink in good time," he said, and there was still no apology. She was coming to learn that he made no apologies in his job, for it or because of it: she was at last beginning to understand the sense of dedication he had.

The plane came over an hour later. They heard it long before they saw it, flying somewhere above the pall of smoke, going round and round in circles it seemed while it sought them.

Down in the valley two thousand faces were turned upwards, and at last a concentration of will brought the plane down out of the dark cloud. It was an old Junkers, and Jack Bermingham looked up at it with the affection of an old friend.

" I first started flying them back in '33," he said, and even the dust on his face couldn't cloud the nostalgia there. There was only one thing that blighted his simple happiness, and that was that he would never fly again. Some men regretted their lost youth, some their lost loves; till he died he would regret the lost thrill of flying. " But my word, that one sounds sick."

" Just let it stay up there long enough to drop us the water," said Macy. " After that, I don't care what happens to it."

" I hope they've brought enough water," Bernice said. " I can't go on much longer." Then she looked at Mary Bermingham. " And Mary is worse than I am."

Macy did not look at his wife, still keeping his eyes on the circling plane. But he felt a weakness within him that was almost like a desire to weep. Bernice was learning the meaning of charity, something that had escaped her up till now, that he had thought would never come to her. There was hope that she yet might

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come to understand why he wanted to stay on here in these outposts. With Bernice beside him, there was nothing more in life that he would ask than to stay on in these mountains to act as doctor to natives who needed his care and never asked to see his degree.

He looked across at his son, Harry, standing in the dust and ashes with the cassowary beside him, and the boy smiled back at him out of a face that cracked like that of an ancient luluai.

Harry, wanting a drink more than he had ever wanted anything in his whole life, looked up at the plane, and out of a throat dry as that of an old man, croaked, " Drop that bloody water! "

The plane made a run along the valley, then turned back. The natives had started to chant and yell, stamping their feet, and dust rose up till the long file of people seemed to turn to just a grey bank of mist laid along the floor of the valley.

Narvo and Rossi moved out to one side, into another flattened native garden, and stood there among the stubble that had been a corn patch and the domes of kau-kau that now looked like children's graves.

The plane came in over them and the red parachute blossomed from its side. It swung out and away from the plane, carrying the water container with it. But the plane had been too low. The parachute dropped away behind the plane, a red streak against the amber sky, and fell with awful sickening suddenness. The container hit the ground, raising an explosion of dust that turned almost instantly to mud as the water burst from the container.

There was something between a moan and a scream from the natives and they plunged forward. The long file suddenly congealed, so quickly it was almost incredible; the farthest natives came in with the speed of running birds. The dust rose in another explosion, went up in a storm so that the crew of the plane could have thought there had been another eruption down in the valley.

Narvo, running awkwardly through the dust and ashes, stumbling on hidden rocks and bushes, beat the natives to the container. One look told him it held no more water.

He stood in the mud it had created and raised his pistol and fired it. The sharp report brought the front runners of the stampede to a halt. But they were hurled forward, falling headlong into the dust, by the impetus of those behind them; and for a moment Narvo thought that he and Rossi, now beside him, were going to be overwhelmed by the grey avalanche of thirst-crazed men, women, and children. He raised his pistol and fired again, and movement slowly died. The front ranks of the huge throng were no more than ten feet from Narvo and Rossi. They glared with angry frustration at the container, lying beside Narvo like the fleshless carcass of an angular beast, and at the water disappearing quickly into the dust and ash.

The two white men stood facing the thousands of natives; and Narvo wondered where Elisabeth and the other whites were. Had

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they been trampled underfoot in the wild stampede to get to the water?

He opened his mouth to shout at them, but only a croak came out of his dry and aching throat. Desperately he sought his voice and at last found it; but it was agony to shout as loud as he had to. In dialect he yelled at them to retreat, to stand back till the plane returned.

There would be water for everyone, he told them; but he, the Kiap, would hand it out to them. None would get more than others, and any man who attempted to take more than his share would be shot.

He stepped forward, still shouting, his voice only a ragged echo of the stentorian roar that had once been his; but there was still authority in his bearing, he still had the power to turn back a tide of men. Slowly the dark throng retreated and a wide flat space was opened up between the natives and the river.

Then the plane was heard coming back, higher this time, flying just below the ceiling of dark smoke and dust. Again the parachute was seen at the side of the plane. It swung out, and for a moment Narvo thought it had caught on the tail assembly of the plane; there was a gasp from the crowd of natives, then everyone seemed to hold his breath.

Suddenly the parachute filled with air; it swung across the smoke-tangled sky like a giant and beautiful flower. It came floating down, the container swinging beneath it, and hit the ground with a soft thud only yards from Narvo and Rossi.

The dust rose up in another cloud, but when it cleared the container was seen to be intact. There was a roar from the natives and once more they surged forward. And once more Narvo raised his pistol and fired. The crowd moved back while the plane came in again.

Four more water containers were dropped and all of them landed undamaged. There would be no more than half a cup of water for each person. The plane kept making more runs, dropping food containers; Neil Figgins, the Commissioner, had done a wonderful job of supply at such short notice. No one was going to get much of anything, food or water, but no one was going to die of thirst or starve to death. Death from the volcano was still their greatest threat.

Elisabeth and the other whites had now appeared out of the crowd. All the women had been knocked headlong by the rush of natives; and Father Shawn, trying to protect Elisabeth and Sister Duggan, had had his glasses broken. But they were all safe and comparatively unscathed, and now they came forward to help Narvo and Rossi dole out the food and water. Narvo had called up the police boys and they formed a guard at either end of the serving line.

There was fighting and scrambling to head the line that was to file past the food and water containers; but Narvo, with a hoarse shout and another pistol shot, soon fixed that. Women and

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children went by first, amazement as well as gratitude on their faces. The men stood back, muttering at this stupid custom of the white men; what was the point of feeding the women and children if the men were not going to be alive and strong to protect them?

Narvo gave the word for the men to come past and there was another wild scramble. Four or five men were fighting to see who would lead the line, when Narvo stepped up to them. He swung his fist. One of the men shot out from the struggling group as if fired from a cannon. The others stopped fighting at once.

Narvo swore at them in dialect, telling them to get back, then returned to stand beside Father Shawn. "The last shall be first and the first shall be last, eh, Mike?"

Narvo had seen the little priest moving up and down the line all morning, ever since they had left Kundavi. He had been helping old people over difficult stretches of the trail, taking babies from their mothers and carrying them for a while, walking farther and using more of his meagre strength than any two other people in the long procession. Without his glasses, the scar showing even through the dust on his cheek, his straw hat gone and his hair matted with dried mud, he looked old and on the point of collapse. But when he smiled up at Narvo there was evidence that the spirit that had kept him going all these years was still very much alive.

The last of the natives had filed by and got his food. The whites doled out shares to the police boys; Beraki, always the correct sergeant, stationing himself at the end of the line; then they began to dole out their own portions, careful to take no more than they had given the natives. But Father Shawn turned away first to help Duggan and Macy feed the patients. Narvo watched him anxiously. He was still looking at Father Shawn when Bermingham and Rossi came up to him.

"That volcano is spitting again," Bermingham said. "I don't reckon we oughta stop tonight, not till we're over that range up ahead."

Narvo looked back at the volcano, now shooting molten rock and steam a hundred feet or more into the air. The sound of it carried down across the slopes and down into the valley; it was almost continuous now, like the barrage before an attack.

The lava spread right down the mountainside now in a brilliant fan that, at this distance, held little threat or even hint of the death it contained. Narvo turned and looked up ahead to the range that rose like a grey scarred wall at the end of the valley.

"It's a bloody long way. At least another eight hours' walking. The kanakas can probably do it, but what about the white women?"

"I am certainly not going to be buried alive," said Duggan, cleaning her glasses of dust, peering back at the volcano that was too distant for her to see. "It's not a decent Christian burial."

"Good for the Presbyterians," said Narvo. "There's a certain Knoxian stubbornness to you, Duggan old girl, that I'm coming to admire."

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"Thank you," said Duggan with a touch of her old tartness. "At one time you used to call it my feminine pigheadedness."

Narvo looked at Elisabeth. "Can you make it, Elisabeth? Do you have enough feminine pigheadedness to get over that range?"

"I'll help her," said Duggan, who had now fully accepted Elisabeth as a friend, even if she had not and never would admit it to the Czech girl.

"So shall I," said Father Shawn.

"There you are," said Narvo. "What more could you want? A representative of the Pope and one from John Knox."

At that moment there was a loud explosion back on the mountain and the floor of the valley began to shudder. There was a roaring seemingly right beneath their feet, and the core of the earth seemed to be trying to hammer its way out of the thin crust that was the floor of the valley. Dust rose up, though the air was absolutely still; and Narvo, watching the river, saw it suddenly change course.

The water rose up above the banks and went in a grey flood across the valley, away from the line of refugees. The ranges were trembling against the sky, their outline turned fuzzy, as if viewed through astigmatic eyes.

Cracks appeared in the floor of the valley, the dust and ash sliding into it like grey snow into crevasses in a glacier; and away up on a slope Narvo saw a slice of earth peel off and slide down in a landslide a quarter of a mile wide.

Looking back he saw the volcano shooting flame and rock and steam hundreds of feet into the air. Then he saw the first of the cinders and rocks falling four or five hundred yards behind them and he knew they were safe, at least from the threat of the volcano.

The trembling of the earth suddenly subsided, there was a loud crack that seemed to come from the sky itself, and a wind blew down the valley and lifted the dust and ash in a blinding storm.

No one moved while the dust swirled about them. They stood there with their eyes and mouths tightly shut and with their hands over their noses, trying to remain conscious on the breath they still held in their lungs.

Elisabeth felt the dust raping her, burying her even as she stood, and suddenly she wanted to scream. Her mind seemed to go black with the effort of holding in the scream; she trembled as much as she had when the earth had rocked beneath her. But she held the scream in and didn't open her mouth. She knew that she would have choked to death on dust and ash if she had.

Then all of a sudden the wind stopped. She felt the dust stop biting at her; it began to settle softly.

Slowly, cautiously, she opened her eyes, blinking away the dust that coated them, and looked out on a nightmare land. Parts of the valley had been exposed by the scouring effect of the wind. The villages on the ridges were now stripped of the decency of their dust-shrouds that had been dust; they were now exposed in

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all their ugly and pathetic tragedy . . . The river, diverted from its bed, was now rushing across the valley floor.

Then Elisabeth turned her head and saw the strangest sight of all. The long line of natives, as soon as the earth tremor had begun, had dropped flat to the ground, as if the Kiap or some fight-leader had shouted a command. They had lain there while the dust boiled above them, and quickly and completely it had covered them.

When the wind had dropped they had remained lying there beneath their dune of dust and ashes, a small ridge that stretched like a low rampart for over a mile along the valley. And as Elisabeth watched, the natives slowly began to stand up.

The dust broke, the rampart fell apart and the grey deathly-looking figures stood up: a row of ghosts over a mile long. To Elisabeth it seemed at that moment the most remarkable thing she had seen in this remarkable land; and yet she was neither alarmed nor even surprised. And she knew then that she had come to accept New Guinea. It was a measure of her rootlessness, of her irrevocable farewell to her own land.

She looked at Narvo, wanting to tell him that, but he was looking back at the volcano. "I think that was its last kick," he was saying. "Look, it's dying down."

"I still don't trust it," Bernice said. "I'd rather walk over those mountains up ahead."

"Me, too," said Harry, brushing dust from the cassowary as if he was preparing it for some bird show. "Let's go on, Roy. I'm getting the creeps."

It took them six hours to reach the top of the range at the end of the valley.

The long procession climbed slowly up the slopes that had once been green and soft with kunai grass, on which the breezes had appeared as dark moving shadows; now they were grey desert hills and the breezes stirred up only ghosts of dust. They came to the beginning of the road that led on to Goroka, and passed the ruins of a Lutheran mission . . .

"I can't believe the blast came this far," said Macy, staring back over the valley at the distant volcano, now looking no more threatening than a faraway fire. "The crater must have been aimed right at this range."

"It only makes me realise how lucky we were to be round the corner from it," Bernice said, and shuddered so that dust shook on her like grey fringes on her dress.

The cross had been blown from the roof of the flattened chapel and had landed upside down in a thick mound of ash. Father Shawn walked across, picked up the cross and, without thinking why he should leave it where it was, shoved it right way up back into the ashes. Then he returned to Narvo and the others.

"I can't understand why someone from Goroka hasn't come in here," Rossi said. "It's only four or five hours' drive."

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Narvo, too, was puzzled. He had hoped to find a truck or two waiting for them here at the mission with food and water. He looked up at the top of the range immediately above them, expecting to see a truck appear against the sulphur-coloured sky; there was nothing but the long line of natives, waiting on him to lead them to safety. They squatted without moving, like a long wooden python nailed against the wall of the slope. All their faces were turned back towards him, waiting patiently on him; but their demand on him plain even through the dust that masked their faces.

Figgins, you bastard, you've let me down, he thought; and for the first time felt the beginning of a break-up within himself. Why couldn't the bloody trucks have been here? What had held them up?

He must have shaken with anger, because the dust moved on him and fell off, so that in the fading saffron light he looked like a man falling apart. He grunted, a curse that was unintelligible, and his hand came up in an involuntary gesture of anger and despair.

His hand brushed against Elisabeth, who had come up silently in the thick dust of the road, and at once he felt his wrist gripped. He turned, startled, and looked at her.

"Roy," she said softly, "is something wrong?"

He could feel the pressure of her fingers, soft yet strong. They could only encompass half of his massive wrist, but there was something about their touch that held him. She was coated with dust and it was impossible to think of her as beautiful. She had taken off her hat as the afternoon heat had worn off and now she wore a wig of thick grey dust. Even her eyes seemed faded, as if the dust had taken the life from them. The dust on the inner edges of her lips was a thin line of mud, and her teeth were dark with the dust.

The thin dress she wore, once yellow, was now a greyish-brown; it clung to her body in parts, but sex was dead under the dust. Yet he knew now that she was important to him, as no other woman had ever been. For the first time in his life he placed reliance on a woman, depended upon her for comfort and strength. And in Elisabeth's gaze he found it.

"No," he said, and turned his hand over and took hers. He put pressure into his own fingers, awkwardly as he tried to be gentle, and he felt a rush of pleasure at the answer in her soft touch. "No, nothing is wrong. I just want to get to the end of this trek."

"So do I," said Elisabeth, and all at once the end of the journey had become a very personal thing for both of them, more than just the attainment of safety.

"Do you think the road has been washed out or something?" Macy said.

"The river doesn't go anywhere near it," Bermingham said. "Well, come on, we can't stand around here magging like a lotta old hens. Let's get over the other side of that ridge. You gunna call a halt then, Roy?"

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" I think we might as well," Narvo said, " and go on first thing in the morning. Maybe they'll have got the trucks through to us by then. I'll radio in as soon as we stop."

Bermingham went back to the head of the procession and the long file slowly and painfully came to life. The natives stood up, the men helping the women gather the children, and they began to trudge up the long steep curling road.

They walked in silence, their throats too dry and their bodies too weary for singing, and slowly the procession climbed out of the dead valley, over the topmost ridge and down a long col through which the road ran, then fell like a twisted rope to the far bottom of another gorge.

Here and there was ash and dust, but only a faint coating of it, and this side of the range showed no effect of the blast. Trees still had their leaves, even if with the dust they all looked the same silver-grey colour, and the kunai grass rolled like a dull sea under the evening breeze that blew in from the east.

Half a mile below the top of the range, in a fold between two ridges, Narvo called a halt. He stood at the top of the range and shouted down to Bermingham. His voice echoed and re-echoed in the silent empty valleys and gorges, and far below him he saw Bermingham raise an acknowledging arm.

He waited on the top of the pass, with Elisabeth beside him, till the last of the natives had filed past. Traxal, walking with Duggan and the patients, went by and looked at them with a closed face that could have hidden bitterness or jealousy or just sardonic amusement.

" I'm still worried about him," Narvo said, as he and Elisabeth began to walk down. They were fifty or more yards behind Traxal and Duggan, and they were able to talk without having to whisper.

" Were you ever really in love with him? " he asked, beginning to act like all men in love, anxious for the pain as well as the pleasure.

" Yes," she said honestly. She knew Narvo would prefer the truth. " Don't be stupid, Roy, and ask me how I could be. Just accept it that I was."

" I wasn't going to be stupid," he said, not hurt. " I just wanted to know, that was all. I wanted to know if you would tell me the truth. A silly woman wouldn't have."

" You don't know women," she said, smiling up at him. " Even silly women know when it is wise to tell the truth to a man."

" I've got a lot to learn," he said, and lifted her hand to his mouth and kissed the dust from it.

It was so unexpected, so unlike him, so European almost, that she looked at him, frightened for a moment that he was deceiving her. But the look in his weary grimed face was enough: he loved her and she knew he would never deceive her. " You'll stay on in New Guinea? "

" Yes," she said, and looked down the road at the head-bent

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figure of Traxal, now shadowy and remote in the evening gloom. "If you want me to."

Then they had caught up with the end of the procession, now lying in the kunai beside the road, exhausted and thirsty and hungry, every native and white hoping that sleep would come without effort and wipe out, for a few hours, memory and thirst and hunger and fear.

Narvo and Elisabeth went on down to where Rossi had set up the portable transceiver and was trying to contact Goroka.

Maugham, the radio officer, answered from Goroka. "Neil Figgins is out with four trucks waiting for you, Roy. He says he is on the road about eight miles south of the Lutheran mission at Bingam. Have you passed there? Over."

"We've just passed Bingam," said Narvo, and gave the news of the tragedy that had overwhelmed the mission. "What's holding up Neil? Over."

"The road has fallen off the side of the mountain," Maugham said. "From what he says, you are going to run into the chances of landslides from now on. You'd better watch your step."

"Yeah, we'll do that," said Narvo, hoping his sarcasm wouldn't show too plainly over the air. "All right. We're going to bed down now for the night. I'll check in at six o'clock tomorrow morning, just before we start walking again. Good night. Over and out."

"Ask him what's on at the pictures this week," Harry said, and ducked and grinned as Narvo cuffed a playful hand at him.

Narvo stood up. "Righto, you'd all better get some sleep. We move out at five past six in the morning. I'll have you all eating and drinking like hogs by lunch-time."

He turned away and Father Shawn said, "Where are you going?"

"I'm going to have a word with the kanakas," Narvo said. "Put them in the picture."

"I'll come with you." Father Shawn tried to hide his pain and exhaustion as he rose. His eyes were sore from dust and the strain of trying to see without his glasses, and each of his heels was covered by a large blister where his sock had worn away. Several times he had ruminated ruefully on what he would have done if the Devil had appeared and offered him a cigarette. He managed to grin at Narvo and said, "I'd like to stretch my legs."

The two men, so incongruous beside each other, went down the road towards the head of the procession. The other whites, now all grouped together, lying in the great dusty bed of the kunai, looked after them.

"Mike never lets him have the last word," said Duggan, polishing her glasses, putting them away carefully in their case before she went to sleep.

"I think Roy lets Mike have the last word," Macy said. "Mike could be his son."

"I always thought it was the other way round," Bernice said,

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wiping the dust and grime from her face as last night she had wiped off her make-up. She loosened her brassière beneath her dress and lay back in the grass exhausted. Her feet were blistered and burning, and she was chafed and sore where the dust had got into the crevices of her body. She cleaned her teeth with her tongue and was ready for sleep.

"Good night, darling," Macy said, and leaned across and kissed her. With his lips close against her cheek, he whispered, "I love you."

She raised a hand and lifted back the long strand of hair that had fallen down over his face. She lifted her face and kissed him fiercely on the lips, feeling the dust turn to mud between them.

Harry, lying a few yards along in the kunai from his parents, turned his head away in embarrassment. But he was full of a happiness that made him forget the soreness of his feet and the dryness of his throat and the aching emptiness in his belly.

After the initial eruption of the volcano he had not been frightened by anything that had happened since. To him it had been a great adventure, the sort of thing he had read about, and throughout the day he had modelled his behaviour on that of Narvo.

He patted the head of the cassowary lying in the grass beside him. "Good night, Wally. Don't bite me, you blighter."

"Talking to me, Harry?" said Traxal.

"Gee, no, Dr. Traxal!"

"A small joke, Harry. I think I must be light-headed with hunger. I feel I should like to tell a thousand jokes—if I could remember them. I suppose one must hear a thousand jokes in one's lifetime."

"I wouldn't know, Dr. Traxal. You hear some pretty crook jokes around our house, but Dad ain't much of a joke teller."

"I used to know some very good ones," Traxal said, and for the life of him couldn't remember one that he could tell to a small boy.

"I dunno any jokes at all," said Harry sleepily. "Good night, Dr. Traxal."

And Traxal saw the boy stretch out in the long grass beside the cassowary and appear almost instantly to drop off to sleep. A spasm of ridiculous anger gripped Traxal and he sat up straight, halfway to leaning across and telling Harry to wake up and listen to him tell a thousand jokes. Then reason and control came back, and he smiled and shook his head at himself.

He lay back, his head propped on his small pack, and tried to see the stars through the dust that clouded the sky. But there was none bright enough to shine through, only the moon glowing like a brazier, a yellow reflection of the crater now miles behind them. He turned his head and looked up over the top of the range and saw the glow on the sky behind the ridges.

He heard a movement and turning his head still farther saw Rossi moving up through the grass towards Elisabeth. The

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young patrol officer was moving cautiously, bent over like a soldier sneaking in for an attack; and without surprise, suddenly too exhausted and alone to care, Traxal thought, He's going to rape her.

He watched as if this was something he was seeing in a film, something that was only supposed to resemble life but which wasn't life: for five shillings he could buy identification, put himself in place of the hero or the villain. But Rossi was neither hero nor villain.

Traxal saw him draw something from behind him—a bag with which to smother her cries?—and lean down and touch Elisabeth's shoulder. She sat up, and the bag turned into a jacket that Rossi was offering her. You poor fool, Traxal thought, you are in love with her, too.

He turned his head away. He was still in love with her himself, but he had lost her.

He looked down the slope, now copper-coloured under the light of the yellow moon, and saw Narvo and Father Shawn slowly working their way back up the long line of natives. Who does he think he is? Traxal sneered. Some general looking after his troops? That would be one way to get rid of life: shoot the general. He would be dead within moments of Narvo's dying, killed by Narvo's police boys. He shuddered at the thought.

From down the slope there came a burst of laughter from Narvo, echoed by the lighter laughter of Father Shawn. Out of the sea of resignation there rose a sudden spurt of hate. Why had he been denied companionship? Life owed *him* something. Why had it given him the personality it had, the character that had made him an island in the ocean of men?

It was too late now. He could never change.

He saw Rossi stand up, say something to Elisabeth, then turn and go quietly back down the slope. Traxal half raised his head, wanting to go to Elisabeth, but knowing that she was now remote from him and unattainable.

Elisabeth herself lay hoping that Narvo, when he returned up the slope, would make his bed, for what it was worth, beside her. It amused her to think that if they should lie together for the first time, it would be in a rough, dusty bed of kunai grass; but she was also struck by the thought that it would somehow be symbolic and appropriate. She had met Narvo in New Guinea, had in a way been drawn to him because of New Guinea, and New Guinea should be their bed.

She looked up and saw Narvo was standing over her. "Where did you get the jacket?"

"Frank gave it to me. It's all right—it was just a friendly gesture. I couldn't say no to that."

"No," Narvo said, and looked down at the hill at the still figure of Rossi. Then he seemed to relax and he smiled down at her. "Are you afraid of your reputation if I bed down here beside you?"

"In these mountains I have no reputation," she said.

"Good. It's an ideal way to be. A good reputation is often

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just as big a load as a bad one." He lay down beside her, raising a small cloud of dust, as if he were lying down in a bed that had been empty for years. She lay on her side, uncomfortable against the rough grass but hardly aware of it, happy and safe.

He put out his hand and took hers. "We're all right now, I think. We'll be in Goroka by lunch-time. Then we are going to have to decide what you'll do."

"Could I get a job in Goroka?" It did not strike her as strange that, here on a high ash-covered slope, beneath a moon streaked and discoloured by volcanic dust, she should be discussing the possibility of finding employment in Goroka. She looked with love at Narvo, who could make her accept New Guinea so easily that she could even forget the horrors of this morning.

"I suppose so. But you don't want to go rushing into anything."

"I have no money. I shall have to rush into something." She smiled, teasing him, and was excited to see him smile back. Already they had the intimacy of lovers, although they had not yet even kissed.

Then he did kiss her. He leaned across and she saw the moon, yellow and bent as an old king's crown, slide off the back of his head. She felt the dust on his lips, and for one horrible moment the thought flashed through her mind that she was kissing a dead man. Terror flooded through her and she lay stiff and unyielding in the grip of a nightmare in which she was fully awake. Tears started at the corners of her eyes and hopelessness covered her like the dust that had haunted her all day.

Then she felt Narvo's hand on her shoulder, warm and firm and loving, and suddenly the nightmare had gone. The tears still in her eyes, she opened her mouth under his, tasting dust but no longer finding any meaning in it, and spoke to him the language that needed no words.

Down the hill Father Shawn saw the two figures merge for the moment; and included them in his prayers. © Jon Cleary 1960

This extract is taken from
"North From Thursday," by Jon Cleary,
to be published in August by William Collins

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SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, *Dead heat.* 5, *Precis.* 9, *Skin-deep.* 10, *Bellow.* 12, *Reason.* 13, *Moderato.* 15, *Skyline.* 16, *Isle.* 20, *Rule.* 21, *Amnesia.* 25, *Minstrel.* 26, *Sketch.* 28, *Loiter.* 29, *Lovelace.* 30, *Dagger.* 31, *Grey mare.*

Down. 1, *Desire.* 2, *Abiram.* 3, *Haddocks.* 4, *Abel.* 6, *Reefer.* 7, *Collapse.* 8, *Sawbones.* 11, *Mounted.* 14, *Plumber.* 17, *Grumbled.* 18, *Clanking.* 19, *Nickleby.* 22, *Athene.* 23, *Strata.* 24, *Phoebe.* 27, *Boer.*

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BEFORE THE FALL

There was the innocence of Eden
in the deep roll of his voice

BY BRIAN CLEEVE

"A is for Apple," I said, and the words hung on the heavy stillness, imprisoned by the grey stones and the dusty windowpanes, with iron bars like shadows behind them in the pale afternoon sunlight.

If I leaned back until my shoulders touched the wall, and looked sideways and upwards, I could see the sky, faded like old cotton that has been washed too often; and below it, a dozen slate-blue rooftops climbing the hill behind the prison, lifting their dour Welsh shoulders above the dark line of the wall.

Beside me Mr. Lembe stirred uneasily on the bench, coughing, his huge pink uncooked tongue sliding between thick purple lips. There was a tinge of grey under the chocolate of his skin, and he was thinner than he should have been, shivering a little in the northern summer and the grey serge uniform.

Beyond him old Mr. Richards knotted his blue-white knuckles on the yellow surface of the table, and stared dreamily through the window, while little Thomas polished his fingernails on his lapel, and Ferris, his face wax-white under the red gold of his hair, blew careless smoke-rings that floated softly upwards to break their symmetry against the whitewashed ceiling.

Only Piney Woods the gipsy, and Mr. Lembe, were interested in the lesson. "Ah?" said Mr. Lembe doubtfully, the vowel fat as a newborn piccanin on his cushiony tongue. "Ah is for Epple?" Obviously he didn't believe me and I felt his interest slipping away, back into the private innocence of his own world—the innocence of Eden in the deep roll of his voice and his enormous anger at what he conceived to be injustice. Every man in prison is innocent, but these five illiterates were peculiarly so, and Mr. Lembe most of all.

It was this same anger that had brought him into prison. He had sunk a whole ship, two thousand three hundred tons of coal and collier in Barry Harbour, when he had been watchman and the rest of the crew had been ashore. He unjustly watchman, and they unjustly getting drunk ashore, or so he thought.

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"Not that Ah drink," he used to say, with his vast gentleness, "except palm wine, and they got no palm wine in Barry. It was the principle of the thing." And for that principle of justice he had opened the sea-cocks and sat on the top of the engine-room ladder, watching the water rise.

Only the mate had been on board, asleep in his bunk, and when he woke he was floating on his mattress, with three feet of water in the cabin. And now Mr. Lembe was in prison, and the Welsh collier *Princess Nesta* was twelve fathoms down and settling in the mud, with only a Port Authority buoy to mark her grave.

"You know," said Piney Woods, scratching vaguely at his slate, "I don't think I'll ever learn it. Sometimes I think I've got it and then I think of something else and when I come back to it it's gone again." He spoke as if learning was a rabbit skilled in freeing itself from the snares he used to set by moonlight.

And down the table old Mr. Richards was murmuring to himself, telling over and over again the story of his innocence, his mind a hundred miles away in the shadowy interior of his herbalist's shop, long green bunches of asafoetida hanging by the narrow doorway, coiled white adders luminous in their jars of alcohol behind the green, bottle-glass panes of the tiny window, and above the counter racks and jars of herbs and ointments whose recipes were older than the cobblestones of the lane outside his door.

"Told me she was in trouble," he was murmuring, and the words floated like shadows into the corners of the cell we were using as a classroom. "Three months gone, she said, and her husband four months from home. Cried till her eyes were pink she did, and said she knew I 'ad pills, I'd sold some to a friend of 'ers. And all the time she was one of them police girls. Not even married, the 'ussy, and getting me eighteen months for trying to do her a good turn."

I could see the pain of the betrayal in his eyes as he stared sightlessly at the dusty window.

Piney smoothed his hands over his slate, smiling at the letter he had tried to write. It might have been A or H or even B, but Piney was proud of it, as lawyers are proud of their stamp collections or their fretwork. It was nice to see the shapes that he had made, and he stared into the slate as if it was a crystal and he could see the woods and the moonlight, and feel the wind blowing from its dark mysterious surface.

He was a gipsy and had been a poacher, slipping like a shadow down the white roads of Wales, over the grey-green hillsides and across the rivers, a brown dog at his heels. And then a gamekeeper had shot the dog, and Piney had set a mantrap for him

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that had amputated the keeper's leg as neatly as a knife could have done; or maybe not quite so neatly. And he stared into the surface of the slate and saw the starlight, cool as frost on the Pembroke hills, like powdered silver.

Beside him, Ferris rolled another cigarette, fatter than the others could afford, but then Ferris was a special case with special privileges—the unwritten, unacknowledged privileges that mark a man's standing in a prison, differentiating the gas-meter thieves and the arrears-of-maintenance men from the aristocracy; the reprieved murderers like Ferris, the Lifers.

The lesson lay forgotten in the corners of our minds; cigarette smoke drifting to the ceiling, the sounds of the prison muted by the walls and quiet, the sounds of the outside so far away that they were only ghosts, without reality.

I'm still not entirely sure why I was teaching the prison's five illiterates, or at least, the only five who admitted to illiteracy. Mainly I think, because no one else was willing. It had all begun with someone's brainwave in the Home Office, that Education was the Road to Reform.

Remembering the way Ferris' grandmother had looked when he was finished with the hatchet, I thought it doubtful that anything I could teach him about the alphabet would do much good, but there is no doubt that from a broader viewpoint the idea had merits.

Little Thomas said that if there was no one to teach them the alphabet they wouldn't be able to get off cell task for lessons, and so I taught them. Or at least, I sat there while the others smoked and talked occasionally or dreamt, Ferris blowing smoke-rings, Thomas polishing his nails.

"Gotta keep 'em nice," he explained to me once. "First thing the blowers look for when they pinch you is marks on your fingers from the mailbag thread. Gives you away at once." He specialised in looting burning shops, dressing up as a fireman in a brass helmet and an oilskin cape.

It had been all right as long as he merely stuffed things under his cape and slipped away with them, but then he'd got too casual. A big store had burnt in Swansea, and he'd gone through it systematically, starting with a rawhide suitcase from the luggage department and filling it as he went along. A policeman had thought it odd to see a rather small fireman carrying a suitcase as if he was going away for the weekend, and the weekend had become four years.

"All that stuff lyin' round in the wet, gettin' ruined. Why shouldn't I 'ave some of it? It wouldn't do no one else any good

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if I left it, would it?" and anyone but a shopkeeper or a policeman would surely be hard put to it to say that it would. "But I'll know better next time," said Thomas, blowing on his nails to see the mist clear from them like tiny mirrors. "It's back to the small stuff under the cape, and sugar mum screechin' about wantin' suit lengths and silk dresses."

A bird flew across the handkerchief of sky and disappeared. Where was it flying? South, across the green shoulders of the hills towards the Channel? North and south had lost their meaning. Winter and summer were only different underwear, and ring of frost underfoot at exercise.

Mr. Lembe coughed, and I came back to the lesson, feeling slightly guilty, but no one minded that I wasn't driving them to learn. After all, as Piney said, we had a lot of time in front of us.

"This Epple," said Mr. Lembe, once he was sure that he had my full attention. "Would it be an Eating Epple?" He had worked on Welsh ships for a long time, and had the faintest trace of a Welsh accent, making a rich voice richer still.

"It could be any sort of Apple," I said carefully, trying to feel my way through the convolutions of Mr. Lembe's reasoning.

"And it cannot be E for Eating Epple?"

"It might be K for Cox's Orange Pippin," said Mr. Richards dreamily.

"Or a nice Russet," said Piney, "or a Somerset Cider."

"Or one of them red ones in the shops," said Thomas, "wrapped up in green paper."

"I shall never learn," said Mr. Lembe sadly. "In my language we have none of these Epples, none at all."

"No apples?" said Ferris, momentarily interested. "What do you have instead? Coconuts?"

But Mr. Lembe was far away, his own language rolling its liquid syllables across his tongue. He had slipped beyond Cardiff, beyond anything that his fellow students knew, into the yellow heat of the sun and the brazen blaze of the sky, the white shawls of foam flinging their lacework on the bright African sand, and the dark, golden, beehive huts half hidden in the shadows of the palm trees.

And in the lagoons of the Slave Coast the crocodiles lay sleeping, and the shining girls came down to bathe, dark brown and glistening with oil.

Outside the barred window the afternoon sun had faded, like a spinster rustling home to tea and Madeira cake, and down the corridor there was a rattling of keys and cans.

"Cocoa up," said Thomas, and the somnolent spirit of the class shattered into splinters, leaving nothing but five convicts

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and myself, although Richards, with his mere eighteen months, was only a convict by the others' courtesy.

I put the slates together, rubbing out the dirty pictures that Thomas and Ferris had developed from their " A "s, and counting the pencils.

The warder on duty opened the door and we filed out, shoes slopping on the worn stones.

" Well, 'ave you taught them to read the race results yet? " said the warder heavily, as I surrendered the slates. " Lot of bleedin' nonsense. Stop that talking there, Thomas. Where d'you think you are? Eton? " And the afternoon faded into the shadows, leaving nothing behind but a fingertip's fill of slate dust.

I never heard what happened to any of them after they were eventually released, although for Ferris and Thomas the future was easy enough to guess. But whenever I buy an apple or pick one from a tree, I think of them all, and I imagine old Mr. Richards back in his narrow herbalist's shop, with its dusty atmosphere of witchcraft and asafoetida; and Piney Wood, loping at night across the fields, another dog ranging the ditches on either hand; and most of all Mr. Lembe, grown fat again with freedom, his lips rich purple and his voice grown large and round with copious draughts of his own language and long matured palm wine—and yet, despite the sunlight and the palm trees, still carrying the faintest, haunting trace of a Welsh accent.

And it's only now that I realise that I mentioned the apple too early in the lesson. A should have stood for Adam, before the Fall.

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HIGH TABLE

We ate with steeps of sky about our shoulders,
  High up a mountainside,
On a terrace like a raft roving
  Seas of view.

The tablecloth was green, and blurred away
  Toward verdure far and wide,
And all the country came to be
  Our table too.

We drank in tilted glasses of rosé
  From tinted peaks of snow,
Tasting the frothy mist, and freshest
  Fathoms of air.

RICHARD WILBUR, *The Terrace*

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Apple Vintage

By the magic of ale and cider . . .

THOMAS HOOD, *Miss Kilmansegg*

Pomona loves the orchard;
And Liber loves the vine;
And Pales loves the straw-built shed
Warm with the breath of kine;
And Venus loves the whispers
Of plighted youth and maid,
In April's ivory moonlight
Beneath the chestnut glade.

LORD MACAULAY, *The Prophecy of Capys*

Golden Fire

Never to be forgotten, that first long secret drink of golden fire, juice of those valleys and of that time, wine of wild orchards, of russet summer, of plump red apples and Rosie's burning cheeks. Never to be forgotten, or ever tasted again . . .

I put down the jar with a gulp and a gasp. Then I turned to look at Rosie. She was yellow and dusty with buttercups and seemed to be purring in the gloom; her hair was rich as a wild bee's nest and her eyes were full of stings. I did not know what to do about her, nor did I know what not to do. She looked smooth and precious, a thing of unplumbable mysteries, and perilous as quicksand . . .

Then I remember little, and that little, vaguely. Skin drums beat in my head. Rosie was close-up, salty, an invisible touch, too near to be seen or measured. And it seemed that the wagon

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under which we lay went floating away like a barge, out over the valley where we rocked unseen, swinging on motionless tides.

Then she took off her boots and stuffed them with flowers. She did the same with mine. Her parched voice crackled like flames in my ears.

LAURIE LEE, *Cider With Rosie*

There was a Young Lady of Ryde,
Who ate some green apples and died;
The apples fermented
Inside the lamented
And made cider inside her inside.

ANON

Utopian Tipple

We also had drink of three kinds, all wholesome and good; wine of the grape; a drink of grain, such as is with us our ale, but more clear; and a kind of cider made of a fruit of that country, a wonderful pleasing and refreshing drink.

FRANCIS BACON, *New Atlantis*

Wine of the West

The wine they praise in Paradise
They make in Ponterey,
The purple wine of Paradise,
But we have better at the price;
It's wine they praise in Paradise,
It's cider that they pray.

The wine they want in Paradise
They find in Plodder's End,
The apple wine of Hereford,
Of Harod Hill and Hereford,
Where woods went down to Hereford,
And there I had a friend.

The soft feet of the blessed go
In the soft western vales,
The road the silent saints accord,
The road from Heaven to Hereford,
Where the apple wood of Hereford
Goes all the way to Wales.

G. K. CHESTERTON, *A Cider Song*

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Orchard Plunder

"Poma quoque," read the pupil in her clear soft treble voice,

"ut primum truncos sensere valentis,
et viris habuere suas, ad sidera raptim
vi propria nituntur opique haud indigna nostrae.

"Apples also, so soon as they feed their trunks . . ." A shadow fell across the page. Looking round for its cause, the diligent pupil's grave grey eyes met a merry pair that watched her through the open lattice window. The late-lying gentleman had at last arisen, and was standing in the garden, leaning his elbows on the casement sill, his brown hair moved lightly by the breeze.

"Good morrow, pretty maid. Art as deep in thy olives and apples as a fruit wench at Covent Garden. But why read of 'em when they wait outside in the orchard for thy picking?"

ROSE MACAULAY, *They Were Defeated*

Conquered Crab

Who would not joy to see his conquering hand
O'er all the vegetable world command?
And the wild gyants of the wood receive
What law hee's pleas'd to give?
Hee bids th'ill-natur'd crab produce
The gentler apples winy juice;
The golden fruit that worthy is
of Galatea's purple kiss.

ABRAHAM COWLEY, *The Garden*, 1666

Barrel of Fire

Emilio, who had an alarmingly weak head, was seated near the cider barrel and stealthily refilled his mug every time Mr. Hoadley's attention was distracted from his end of the table; soon he became smiley and knowing and inclined to put his arm round Mary Parkes . . . It all seemed most comfortable to Fabrio: the brilliant light and savoury food, and the flow of stinging golden drink from that little barrel; and how he would have enjoyed it all—if only she would have been kind!

. . . Sylvia's anger abated as the supper went on, for she was too devoted to pleasure and too light-hearted to resist the enjoyments spread about her, and she amused herself by twisting flower crowns . . .

STELLA GIBBONS, *The Matchmaker*

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DO YOU DIG GRIEG?

The whole thing happened between two ticks of the clock

BY JOAN AIKEN

HAVE you ever been haunted by the ghost of a bear? No, and neither had Arnold Key, but it had happened to his brother Simon, with whose story we are not at present concerned. This is just to give you Arnold's background, and to help account for the troubles that overtook him.

His father was a coalminer, his mother was the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter, and Arnold himself was one of those tall, copper-haired, rather gangling but engaging Scots who are often first violins in orchestras. His eyes were blue, his long nose turned up, and he looked altogether as inoffensive as a bunch of daffodils. He did in fact play first violin in the City of London Studio Orchestra, but his main interest was the composition of non-associative music. That and listening.

Stop reading now and listen. What can you hear? A clock ticking, a kettle boiling. Footsteps in the room above. Traffic, gulls, a tap dripping. Your own ears whispering, your own heart beating. But beyond *that?*

Arnold's compositions were at the other end of the scale from programme music. They were carefully constructed to remind the listener of nothing he had ever heard in his life before.

Arnold's wife, Magda, was a sultry, smouldering beauty, sooty-haired, sloe-eyed, and rather the shape of an alto clef. She came of mixed Czech and Hungarian extraction, and had married Arnold in order to get out of a passport predicament. She was fond of him, in a mild way, but he left her feeling slightly baffled, as if she was scored for more parts than he could provide. He, on his side, occasionally wondered whether the phosphorescent glow which she seemed to wear at times could be accounted for by teaparties with the second violas or gossip with the flautist's wife.

Also, she irritated him. She was fond of the music of Haydn, whose compositions were so far from being non-associative that

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they had been nicknamed after common objects and animals. "Good God," Arnold muttered sometimes, "The Hen! The Bear! The Clock! Preserve me from such nursery stuff!"

Very well. It was spring. Arnold was walking home through the city of London from the Chiropodists' Hall where rehearsals were held, sniffing the fresh scents of violets on barrows, part of his mind fidgeting at a concerto for two trombones and triangle.

Suddenly he stopped walking. His attention had been caught by one of those builders' observation platforms, now so common about the city, overhanging a deep construction pit filled with machinery and myriads of ant-like workmen, which would in due course contain the five basement storeys of a massive new office building.

Arnold stepped up on to the platform. What had chiefly taken his fancy was the row of shocking-pink telephones along the platform rail, and the notice:

LOOK AND LISTEN BY COURTESY OF WAPSHOTT CO., LTD.

Arnold picked up the telephone and, gazing down into the pit, listened.

"... site-foreman Mr. Percy Jones," said the voice. "On your right you will see a stack of hollow pillars which will be sunk to a depth of forty feet and filled with liquid concrete. Superintending this part of the work is Mr. Mick Smith. The architect in charge of the whole operation is Mr. Bernard Mauleverer. The completed building will house twenty thousand office workers, a restaurant, a basement car-park, two shopping arcades, and a cinema. We shall be bringing you a different progress report every two days. Thank you for listening."

Arnold was disappointed. He had hoped for the sounds of construction, for some quintessence of clangs, rumbles, tintinnabulation, grinding, whizzes, and thuds, which might have stimulated him to new ideas.

The other men on the observation platform replaced their phones and moved off. Arnold kept his receiver to his ear, in the forlorn hope that something besides a repetition of the commentary would come through.

He was rewarded.

First there came a drift of silence—silence so clear, so pure, so bell-like that in comparison with it any sound seemed a mere smirch on the eardrum. Then a faint, faraway voice whispered, "Key? Arnold Key? I'm waiting for you."

Echoes carried the words in canon to his ear. "Key, I'm waiting; Key, I'm waiting, waiting for you, waiting for you, for you, for you, for you..."

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And then the silence again.

He replaced the receiver. He stared at it. Picked up his violin and wandered home like a man in a trance. What did this message mean? Was it the buried voice of some musical offering inside himself, asking to be let out?

"Hon-nee!" Magda greeted him with a rich fragrance of soup and a voluptuous eye. She rubbed her biscuit-coloured cheek on his, and cradled his ear on her collarbone.

Tick, tick! he could hear her heart beating, and beneath it, far away, the tiny voice: "Key! Arnold Key! I'm waiting for you!"

If only it were possible to go somewhere deep and quiet, where he could really listen, really pay attention . . .

"I must do some digging," Arnold said abruptly.

"Deegging?" Magda stared at him as if he had gone crazy. "You weesh to deeg? Why?"

He crossed restlessly to the window and stared at a small bird's-eye view of windblown Thames. "I don't know. I just feel I want to get down—deep—to the roots of things. Where there isn't any noise."

"You need a peell, my leetle one," said Magda, following and curling herself round him like an eiderdown, one cool hand on his brow. "Where you deeg here? Ees no garden, no earth at all."

"No, I know there isn't," said Arnold angrily, glowering at the pavement. "You can't even *see* the earth in London. We'll go to Horseley for the weekend."

Magda loathed Horseley, where his brother's untenanted bungalow was always available to Arnold. Like a city cat, she hated out-of-doors in any form. The wind ruffled her fur.

She stayed by the bungalow fire, wrapped in quilts, eating marzipan, while Arnold rushed fretfully out into the nettle-grown garden with a rusty spade. But after half an hour he came indoors.

"They're driving me mad!" he exclaimed in a rage.

"You weesh some marzeepan?"

"No thanks," he said, shuddering.

"Who drive you mad?"

"Those damn birds! And the wind! How can I get on with my concerto in all that confounded natural racket? It's like a—a tonal picture-postcard!"

"We go back to London, yes?" Magda said agreeably, uncoiling herself and finishing the last bit of marzipan. Her husband nodded glumly.

Magda was a bit disconcerted to observe, as they retreated through the garden, that Arnold's digging had not produced a

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useful plot, where asparagus might be raised, or strawberries, but a ten-foot-deep hole of no conceivable use to anyone except an undertaker.

"What you deeg thees beeg peet for?"

"I tell you, I want to get down, deep down, where there's no noise."

"You try Peecadeelly tube, no?"

"Oh be your age, Magda," he said crossly. "You can't hear yourself *think* down there."

Magda's brow was furrowed. "I think you should veesit psychiatrist, yes?"

"*No!*" he shouted. "What's odd about wanting a bit of peace and quiet?"

However, Magda was not one to let the grass grow under her feet, and next day saw her visiting Dr. Killgruel, a Harley Street mental specialist, for a confidential consultation. She had waited until Arnold was safely at a rehearsal because she could see that he was going to be difficult about the whole business.

Dr. Killgruel was a susceptible man. Magda's smouldering beauty acted on him like a cigarette-end on a corner of dry newspaper. "Tell me your trouble, my dear," he said invitingly.

"Ees not mee," Magda told him, arranging herself with devastating effect on his couch. "Not a theeng wrong weeth mee."

"Well no, no; of course I can see that, but then—?"

"Ees my husband, he oll time weesh to do notheeng but deeg!"

"He must be crazy," said Dr. Killgruel, using, in the excitement of the moment, a word customarily barred by members of his profession.

"Crazee? You theenk so? What shall I do? Ees not good beesness to be marreed to a crazee man."

"You must get him to come and see me."

"He never do that, nevair," declared Magda with conviction. She gazed consideringly at Dr. Killgruel. "I haf idea. I come to see you, you tell me proper treatment to geeve to Arnold, no?"

The suggestion had its points. Dr. Killgruel saw that at once.

"A kind of remote control? It *might* work, at that."

"We try, yes?" Magda gave him a dazzling smile. The smile finished him.

"We'll try. First of all you must make sure that as often as possible he is completely calm. Make him relax, stroke his brow—"

"Like thees?"

"*I* do the stroking. I'm showing *you* how. Give him a soothing drink."

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" Soch as cocoa? "

" Cocoa? Heaven forbid. Such as brandy. Of course it must be *good* brandy," said Dr. Killgruel, fetching a bottle and two glasses from a cupboard. " See that when he rests he is completely limp, even his fingers and toes—feel them to make sure."

" Docteur, you are teeckle me," sighed Magda, " but just the same I theenk thees treatment do Arnold good."

The treatment, carried on in daily doses, did Magda a great deal of good, but Arnold became more and more fine-drawn, haggard, and inattentive. Since he never told Magda of the little, deep, faraway subterranean voice which interrupted his work and sleep with the reminder, " I'm waiting for you, Arnold Key! " it is not surprising that the remote-control cure was, to some extent at least, on the wrong lines.

" I am lose oll my patience! " snapped Magda, coming into Dr. Killgruel's office one day with a large bunch of roses. " He steell want to deeg! And he keep ollways the cottonwool in his ears, he nevair hear a word I speak. Even his conducteur dees-meess him because he nevair leesten to other playeurs. I am leave heem, I theenk."

" Leave him? Oh, I shouldn't do that," said Dr. Killgruel hastily, foreseeing complications. " No no, I'll find him some congenial occupation. Therapeutic, you know. He wants to dig? I think I know the very thing . . ."

Magda put it across quite well.

" You weesh to see a beeg hole? " she said cunningly to Arnold that evening, after obliging him to unplug one of his ears.

" All right," he said with grudging interest. " Where? "

" Ees on the South Bank. Where they build that skyscraper of thirty storeys. He teelt sideways, I am read in evening paper. He lean even more than Leaning Tower of Pisa."

" They didn't shore up the base enough, I suppose. That's what comes of building on mud. What a waste if it all falls in the river."

" Not so," said the well-informed Magda. " Now they deeg even deeper hole beneath, feell foundations with frozen concrete. We go see, yes? Ees eenteresting, no? "

" All right."

All round the leaning skyscraper was a scene of frenzied activity. Giant rotary concrete-mixers were at work, with a noise like dinosaurs gnashing their teeth; trucks rolled up one behind the other with the great tanks of carbon-dioxide ice which would freeze the concrete to impregnable toughness; and in the cellars of the half-finished building the apparatus was being hastily

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installed which would keep the surrounding ground permanently at fifty below zero. A huge notice by the site entrance said, LABOURERS WANTED. *Any able-bodied man with a few hours to spare is invited to apply to the Site Foreman. Generous pay.*

Magda led Arnold to an observation platform, and his wondering eyes dropped down and down into the fantastically deep shaft that was being sunk to take the concrete shoring. The jaws of the excavators snapped and flung up crumbling mouthfuls of clay and rock, containing who knows what hippopotamus teeth, Viking shields, Mithraic emblems, even the head of Thor's hammer.

"I must get down there," Arnold said, straining away from Magda like a caught fish held above its native stream.

A smile momentarily curved her pale, full cheek as he threw her a perfunctory wave and darted down to join the insect-hordes below. She remained a moment, gazing at the scene. It was really very fine, she thought pensively, like one of Hieronymus Bosch's wilder masterpieces: far away the sunset sky, smoky red behind the Houses of Parliament; near to, the blue-white glare of arc-lights and the mad, intricate masses of toiling humans, pushing, pulling, digging, hurling; the grotesque machines, the crablike shadows, and over all the leaning threat of the skyscraper which resembled nothing in the world so much as the upper half of a great and gaping pair of jaws.

Perhaps it fall and flatten the lot of them, thought Magda comfortably. That solve my problem once and for all, no?

Then, losing interest, she turned, waved up a taxi—taxis swooped on Magda, no matter how pitch-dark the night or remote the place, like bats to torchlight—and told it to take her to 406D Harley Street . . .

The excavators could dig just so deep and no deeper. Below that, the final clearing at the bottom of the shaft had to be done by hand. There were not many volunteers for this part of the work, which was dangerous because of falling fragments, and Arnold's offer was accepted at once.

He was let down by cable and, as he descended, the clang, rumble, and clatter up above him died away and vanished to be replaced by a thick, unnatural, earthy silence.

His job was to dig, scoop, and load earth into a container like a gigantic coal-scuttle which was lowered, raised, and lowered again as he tirelessly filled it.

After some hours a message came down, pencilled on a slip of paper, *Don't you want a rest?*

No thanks, wrote back Arnold with the next load of hippos' teeth and Vikings' bones.

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He was enjoying himself as never before.

He had been instructed to make a star-shaped cavity, with radiating tunnels which were to be packed with ice. A dozen such grottoes were being dug out round the skyscraper's roots. Some tunnels were already packed with their frozen filling. Under the dangling light, frost shimmered on smooth surfaces of sweating clay. It was deathly, unearthly cold; only Arnold's constant activity kept him from turning blue.

Suddenly his pick, swung with double vigour because he was nearly at the end of a tunnel, bit clean through an expanse of soft rock and left a crumbling hole behind.

" A cave," Arnold said to himself. " That saves trouble."

He swung his pick again and cleared the sides of the hole until he could step through.

It was like a glade in an underground forest—a long pillared passage, wide as a motorway, silent as a crypt. And at the far end burnt a little light.

" Key, Key, Key," said the whispering voice. " Come this way. Come to me."

When he reached the end of the gallery he saw a Being, sitting on a throne, waiting for him. Arnold's education was only mediocre, but he recognised the being from far-off fairytales—the blue skin, the three heads, the hair that stood on end, and the fact that the air all round the throne for a distance of about three feet vibrated like heat-waves over a tin roof on an August day.

Arnold stood shivering-still and his knees knocked together.

" Wh-who are you? " he said, although he knew.

The creature turned its six glittering eyes on him and spoke with all its three mouths at once.

" I'm a Troll, oldy-woll," it said, adding reflectively, " and I'll eat you for supper."

Its voice rolled through the vault, touching Arnold on some exquisitely sensitive part of his tympanum with the effect of an electric shock.

" *Eat* me? " he exclaimed. " No, no, that would be ridiculous! Surely it wasn't for that you fetched me down here? "

" It was, it was," said the Troll. " Few people nowadays can hear my voice. I get hungry. I haven't had a decent supper for a thousand years, thousand years, thousand years, years, years."

It rose to its full nine-foot height and made for Arnold.

" No, but please don't eat me! " he screamed. " Your voice has given me such a superb idea for a musical composition."

The Troll stopped, baffled. " Well, I'll let you off *this* time," it said reluctantly, " but you must give me the first live thing you set eyes on when you get home."

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"All right." The chances were, Arnold knew, that this would be the porter's revolting little dog, which lurked inside his front door ready to nip the ankles of passers-by.

"I must go now," he said in a hurry, before the Troll changed its mind. He ran back along the gallery, and the Troll settled down calmly on its throne to wait, glowing blue in anticipation.

A load of frozen concrete was waiting in the shaft, and Arnold hastily scooped it up and packed it into the cave doorway, though aware that this would make little difference to the Troll if it intended to come out.

Then he jerked the cable, signifying that he needed a rest spell.

It was four a.m. when Arnold got home. He had walked through the grey, silent reaches of Southwark, Lambeth, and Battersea, with music twirling in his head like a corkscrew. He forgot the Troll, his promise, everything in his anxiety to get the new composition written down.

The caretaker's little dog was fast asleep, dreaming of juicy, tempting ankles. Arnold let himself quietly into the flat.

"Pencil," he said to himself. "Put coffee on to heat up, find paper. Where the devil did I put that new stack of manuscript paper? Bedroom, of course." He went in, switching on the light, very much disconcerting Magda and Dr. Killgruel who had not expected him home that night.

"Ah, here's the paper," Arnold said, "I knew I'd left it somewhere," and he was about to return to the living-room when the Troll, prompt to collect its debts, spun into the room like a nine-foot top, giving off incandescent sparks. The whole room whirled round it, much as a potful of vegetable soup whirls round the stirring spoon, and then it was gone again, taking with it Magda and the protesting psychiatrist. The whole thing happened between two ticks of the clock.

Arnold hardly noticed. He flung himself down at the table and set to work on the piece of music in which disgusted critics would later find so much resemblance to *The Hall of the Mountain King.*

He never dug another hole.

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★ ★ ★

BARE FACT

One reason that I like to see
A girl in a Bikini
Is that there's so much visible
Above, below, betweeny!

DICK EMMONS

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PAINTED SHIP

The sail glinted in hot sunlight—
a warm breeze fanned his cheek

BY P. M. JOLLEY

THE dim and somewhat dusty front window with its collection of old copper, pewter, and brass; the ornamental, the beautiful, and the hideous, invited Conway to pause in his idle wanderings down the quiet Devon street. He stared at the medley of goods which bore the flattering label of antiques, but the pale English sunlight imposed his shadow on the window between, and his mind reverted, as it so often did these days, to himself.

What was he doing here in this sleepy Devon village, in this little island that would fit easily into a corner of the wide East African territories? Lovely as were the lush green fields, the tidy hedgerows, the charming pastel cottage gardens, and the toy farms, his heart ached for vast plain and rolling hill, for the brilliant blue of vaulted sky and the immeasurable grandeur of the rain forests. Yet he could never go back. That much was certain. Charles Conway, District Commissioner, after more than half his life's service in the bush, was repatriated to the land of his forefathers.

He recalled with poignant clarity the moonlight-filled night with its shrill choir of cricket and frog, the distant call of jackal, and the roar of a prowling lion; the warm, sparkling dawn, crystal clear, that greeted the new day on the vast horizons of Tanganyika; the blazing heat of noon, with the Africans lying sprawled and carefree beneath the spreading baobab—but these were not for him.

"Too long in Africa," they had said with a smile, tolerant and understanding. But he knew better.

It all started with the murder of Nathan's wife.

For a long time he had known that Munguni, the old tribal witch-doctor, had been the moving factor in all the troubles that beset the large African community in his district. But a witch-doctor is a powerful being, feared by his people and his chief, respected by the white administrators of law and order; and even

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if his influence be evil, it is a tricky business to get rid of him. When the headless body of Nathan's wife was found, and when Munguni was caught within seconds of the crime with a bloodied panga which he sought to hide, Conway had difficulty in concealing his grim satisfaction. Nathan had cried for vengeance, and the reign of Munguni was over.

Or was it over? Conway recalled, with the faint shiver that always accompanied the memory, the look that Munguni had given him when he was sent for his final walk. "The Bwana Mkubwa shall not forget me," he had said, his red-veined eyes glittering with hatred, "and I shall not forget him. I shall be with him till he dies."

Not much of a curse really. He dismissed it from his mind and went about his work as usual, noting with satisfaction the swift improvement in the district after the demise of Munguni. Crops fared better, there were fewer quarrels and crimes, and the secretive look of fear disappeared from the dark faces.

A month went by, and he had almost forgotten the witch-doctor.

Then, one night, the pains had begun. They shot through his head like brands of flame, and he cried out with their sharp agony. He had no idea how long they lasted, but when he awoke in the morning, bemused and heavy-eyed, he looked at the wreck of his room with dull amazement. His sheet was ripped almost to threads, the pillow had been flung across the room to land on his dressing-table, scattering the contents to the floor, and his water glass lay smashed near the overturned bedside table.

His servant had stood aghast in the doorway, and Conway answered his questioning look with a curt order to clear up the mess. He felt sick and dazed most of that day, but the night brought no recurrence of the attack, nor the next, nor the next.

A week later the pains came again, with increased violence. "The Bwana is sick," the word went round; and his officers looked sympathetically at his haggard face and respectfully hinted at early leave. He wondered about a trip to the coast—perhaps he had been overworking recently, he would see about it next month. Then he had an attack one day when he was holding a baraza, and had to ask his District Officer to deputise while he was helped back to his bungalow . . .

He had taken his leave, and felt fine during the whole month. He swam, fished, goggle-dived, and lay in the sun in peaceful lethargy until he felt refreshed and rested in both mind and body. A week after his return up-country, the pains attacked him again and again.

Senior government officials came to see him and were very polite. "How old? Forty-five? Not so very far off retiring,

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really. You can have too much of this country, you know. Too long in Africa, old boy. How about somewhere quiet in England? Devon's very lovely. I'm looking forward myself to the day when I drop anchor in the old country. We can arrange a passage for you next month, give you time to hand over . . ."

Too long in Africa. That's what they had said. It covered so much. It covered, too, the strange, unknown, primitive forces that work in Africa, the things no one can explain. High government officials, farming settlers, the Africans themselves, all knew and respected the mysterious secret law that worked beneath the surface of Africa. Only the newcomers scoffed and disbelieved, until they, too, slowly were compelled to accept the dark, unanswerable power that mocked at civilisation.

Too long in Africa. So here he was, with his cottage in Devon, his kindly, capable housekeeper, his curious, friendly neighbours, and a third of his life ahead, empty of all that he loved. But he was better. There had been no more attacks, and he had tried to vary the even tenor of his way with the mild exercise of village cricket and country walks.

The reflection in the antique-shop window showed his tall, thin form clad in conventional tweeds, his deep suntan yellowing under the pale English sky, and his hair perhaps a little greyer than a year ago. But still too young, too active, to retire with only memories.

He focused his eyes against the mirrored light. He took in with mild interest the copper warming-pan, the brass plate, the pewter pots, the candlesticks, and the thrown-out junk of assorted china ornaments.

His eyes roved beyond the narrow window to the dim interior. He could just see the dusty hues of a few framed oil paintings ranged round the walls, and then his gaze was riveted to a barely discernible shape, a flash of bright colour among the dull collection. With a quickening interest and faintly rising hope, he moved towards the door and, ducking his head, entered the small overcrowded room. He took one look and caught his breath. He was not mistaken.

It was a framed picture of a dhow. There was no glass, and the thick, bold daubs of wax stood out in bright relief against the darkened parchment. It was a fine, if crude, depiction of the stately Arab ship that still plied the ancient routes from India and the Persian Gulf down the eastern coast of Africa, with high poop, massive sail, and proud, curving bows—the romantic link between the turbulent past and the quiet present; unchanged; part of the familiar pattern of East Africa.

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He examined it closely. He had associated the sealing-wax craft only with crinoline ladies and gardens of hollyhocks, decorated wooden bowls, matchbox holders, and diary covers—the sort of useless presents seen at charity fêtes—and he was struck by the brilliant use of this medium made in the picture before him. Nostalgia consumed him. He looked for a price tag.

There was a shuffling behind him, and he turned to see a plump woman in carpet slippers coming towards him, an anticipatory smile on her wide face as she wiped her hands down her apron. "Can I help you, sir?" Her voice was rich with the throaty dialect of Devon. "My husband isn't in at the moment, but I can look up anything you want—it's all in the catalogue."

Conway smiled. "Thank you. I'm interested in this picture of a ship. Could you tell me the price?"

She beamed. "There now, I always liked that picture, nice and bright, though I've never seen a ship like it afore. Just a minute, and I'll find out the price for you."

She reappeared holding a dog-eared notebook. Conway peered over the smudged entries and handed her the price indicated, thinking it ridiculously cheap. The woman wrapped the picture carefully in brown paper, and he carried it away beneath his arm, feeling elated at his unusual find.

He hurried through the village and down the narrow, high-hedged lane that led to his cottage, eager to hang his purchase in its new home.

His housekeeper looked up from the snowy tablecloth when he entered the low-ceilinged living-room, and smiled at him. She was a small, trim woman with a pleasant face. With the innate sympathy of her kind she had sensed her employer's depression of spirit, and was firmly convinced that what he needed was a wife.

"Should have married long ago," she confided to her husband. "It doesn't do a man any good to spend his life with only natives for company. He needs a woman around the place." Consequently, Mrs. Garner fussed over his wants and attended to his cooking with an enthusiasm that touched him, and he felt a deep sense of gratitude for her kindness and efficiency.

She saw at once that something had pleased him.

Conway placed his parcel carefully on the long window seat and started to remove the paper. He lifted the picture expectantly, and looked round the small room for an appropriate place. Over the fireplace where he could lie back in his favourite easy chair and stare at it—yes, that was it. The pale watercolour of some moorland scene was quickly taken down, and when he had put up his new possession and adjusted it to his satisfaction, he stepped back and surveyed the result.

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Mrs. Garner, pausing in her brisk journeys between kitchen and living-room, put down a plate of hot scones and gave vent to her admiration. "Such a bright, cheerful picture, Mr. Conway. Why, the room looks quite different now!"

It looked different in a subtle, indefinable way. The picture dominated the room and gave it brightness. Some foreign element, full of the warmth and colourful splendour of a southern clime, had crept into its prim, prosaic pattern and infused it with a glow of romance, of expectancy.

Conway sat down to his tea. He was extraordinarily conscious of the picture above the fireplace, and several times lifted his eyes and scanned it, feeling a deep pleasure in the familiar scene. What strange coincidence, he wondered, had brought this relic of East Africa to the quiet English village? He speculated on its history and origin, and felt a warm friendliness towards its last unknown owner.

That evening, he did not take his usual stroll down to the sea, but chose instead to sit in his favourite armchair. He settled down with his pipe, his feet extended to the warmth of the driftwood fire that Mrs. Garner lit for him these evenings, for the nip of autumn chilled his thin blood, his nightly bottle of beer standing at his elbow. And after his housekeeper had bidden him good night before she went home, Conway began to reflect that his present mode of living, monotonous and useless though it might be, had its compensations, and that many a man would delight in it.

He picked up a travel book and started to read. But the printed page seemed lifeless, and instead of the adventures of an intrepid explorer his mind's eye pictured the lazy, limpid seas beyond Bagamoyo and on to Zanzibar.

The names floated through his thoughts with sharp nostalgia, and before he realised it he had raised his eyes and was absorbing greedily the lovely, bold lines of the dhow, with high prow lifting to the swell of aquamarine waters . . . The waxen sail glinted in hot sunlight, and he fancied a warm, salt-laden breeze fanned his cheek.

His mind drifted to the past, and a cavalcade of memories clamoured for his attention.

Time passed, and the fire died to a glow, when Conway was suddenly conscious of a strange sensation of movement—it was as if the room dipped and swayed around him, the walls receded into a haze, and the chair rolled and sank and rose again, like the motion of a ship.

He sat upright with a start and shook his head as if to rid it of the misty past, while the room steadied and resumed its

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normal, everyday size about him. The chair was solid again and, looking rather dazedly at his watch, he saw that it was past his usual bedtime. Must have dropped off, he persuaded himself, must have been a dream. He picked up his fallen pipe and went out of the room, stubbornly refusing to give a last backward glance at the picture.

That night, for the first time since he had been in England, he was subject to a severe attack, the pains shooting like sword thrusts through his tired brain until he screamed for some power, on earth or above it, to have pity on his distress. He writhed and twisted on his bed, his hands clawing his scalp, the sweat pouring out of his body. He could not tell whether a minute or an hour had passed when the pains suddenly ceased and he was left a limp, exhausted being who dropped instantly into the blessed oblivion of sleep . . .

The room in the morning showed the same state of chaos as on other occasions, and Conway, peering into the mirror uneasily, saw his face haggard and lined, his fading tan turned to a sickly yellow.

He descended the steeply-curving stairs slowly, like a man aged and infirm, and crept into breakfast hoping to avoid Mrs. Garner's kindly, curious eye.

She exclaimed the moment she saw him and, without waiting for his stumbling explanations of a nightmare, suggested firmly that a doctor was needed.

" Nonsense," Conway answered, more sharply than he intended. Then he went on, with a flash of inspiration, " There's nothing at all a doctor can do for me. It's just the recurrence of a fever I had in Africa. I often get these attacks; they're nothing to worry about."

" All the same, Mr. Conway, sir "—Mrs. Garner spoke with dignity—" you must take things easy. If you want to spend a day in bed just resting, I'll bring your meals up to you—no trouble at all."

" That's very good of you "—Conway smiled with real appreciation—" but I shall be all right. I think I'll stroll down to the sea after breakfast and get some fresh air."

The housekeeper made no comment about the state of his room, but she shook her head sadly over the torn sheet and went off to mend it, feeling a great pity for those who had to spend their lives in such dangerous, fever-ridden parts. " Wouldn't have happened if he'd had a wife," she told herself grimly.

The attack marked the beginning of the worst spell Conway had ever known.

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Night after night he awoke to searing pain, and every morning showed his room in such disorder that he could only conceive that he must leave his bed and stagger from wall to wall in a sort of blind madness.

Madness—that was the word he dreaded, tried to avoid thinking about, but he knew that his nerves were raw and ragged, almost unbearably tormented. He began to shun all company in case his sick appearance and jerky, uncontrolled movement occasioned comment. He saw as little of his housekeeper as he could, feeling her concerned eye always upon him.

Instead, he took to spending long hours on the cliff beyond the cottage garden, staring into the cold, grey-green waters below him. Such a different sea from those he knew so well, where the water was so lucent that one could clearly see the golden sand, the coloured mosaic of coral, the floating seaweed, the brilliant, darting fish . . .

His picture lured him hourly, but a curious reluctance to observe it increased until he began to feel a powerful urge to do it violence, a terrible craving to destroy it. When, almost defiantly, he did stare at it, it was like returning to a drug that satisfied yet tortured; to abstain from it was practically unbearable.

The world which the dhow created for him seemed more real than the present. His imagination sailed with it to familiar, well-loved places, tinted and softened by time, and made bitter-sweet by exile. He felt chained to a nightmare existence, which his brain fought against tiredly and hopelessly, like a man sinking in shifting sands.

One evening in late November he sat before the fire, too languid to read, too weary to brave the cold without. As his eyes lifted inevitably to his picture, he felt the first needle of pain. He groaned aloud and clasped his head in his hands, awaiting the dreaded onslaught.

It came with a fury and violence that sent him reeling from his chair, his brain empty of all but pain, his body trying to find outlet and relief in bruising his clenched fists against the walls and furniture. His mind clouded with a consuming rage, and through the red mist that swam before his eyes the lines of the dhow formed with sudden clarity.

It seemed a thing apart, inviolate, for ever serene and warm in its sunlit sea, the haughty tilt of russet sail pointing a derisive finger at him.

Its very stillness and tranquillity mocked his agony, and he felt a deep hatred well up inside him and overwhelm his reason.

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His fingers itched and curved to destroy it. He reached out blindly for the nearest weapon. His hand closed round a heavy oil lamp on the table before him and, maddened with pain and rage, he hurled it savagely at the painted vessel.

It exploded against the wall and its glass shivered back into the room. Its liquid contents fountained upwards over the shiny wax, over the wooden mantel, and made an ever-widening pool on the stone hearth where the metal base lay dented and split.

The savage action seemed to release the knot of pain and, with dulled and deadened senses, he watched the silent growth of spilt paraffin.

With a swiftness and brilliance that hurt his eyes, a sheet of searing orange flame flared upwards like an inverted fan, its hissing roar filling the small room. It folded round the low mantel, and in a matter of seconds drew answering sparks from its blackening wood. It crept up the wall in ever-increasing leaps, and sent exploratory tongues over the smooth waxen ripples of the painted sea.

He watched the spreading conflagration helplessly, his mind numb, until a movement beyond the fire's activity caught his attention, and the next moment he was transfixed in growing horror.

The blue-and-green waters of the waxen sea were undulating, sliding, slipping, streaking the cream wall with smears of ultramarine and turquoise, and above them the dhow itself began a slow descent, unevenly, its brown sides distorted and elongated.

The great russet-and-tan sail in its dignified splendour was the last to succumb to the fire's insistence—it dropped slowly, resentfully, pouring its autumnal shades in large pear-shaped drops to mix with the melted wax in one great kaleidoscope of colour . . .

It was like watching the spilling of a witch's brew into a bubbling cauldron of brilliance.

In bemused fascination he watched the awful disintegration, then lifted his eyes to the cleared parchment. What he saw, grotesquely and devilishly illuminated by the bright flames, sent the world rocking about his ears. He stood for one quivering moment paralysed with a terrible sense of doom. The slender thread of reason snapped, and he gave a sharp cry of despair and fled from the firelit horror.

Plunging blindly into the night, his feet stumbling on the familiar path, he headed towards the cliff, his mind, a ghastly chaos of past and dreadful present, urging his body on to destruction and oblivion.

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The edge of the cliff yawned black against the pale phosphorescence of the sea as he pitched forward with a wild, half-human scream, which the night wind swept into silence.

The splash of his hurtling body was lost in the monotonous sound of the surf, and the cold green sea closed over him.

Nothing broke the vast expanse of those pounding waters—nothing at all.

Bill Garner paused, breathing heavily, on the threshold of Conway's cottage. He had felt there was something up next door when he heard the cry, and sure enough it seemed the place was on fire. He peered into the living-room, then recoiled with a startled exclamation . . .

"Gave me quite a turn," he told his sorrowing wife later. "There were the flames licking all round that picture over the fireplace. And a horrible picture, too, enough to scare anyone.

"Some grinning black face it was, all smeared with paint and wearing horns and earrings. A bloomin' witch-doctor I should think, by the looks of him; and with the fire raging all round him he looked just like a devil—a devil grinning in hell."

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SOLUTIONS to THE LONG AND THE SHORT OF IT

on page 56

1. *a. American poet,* 1807-1882; *b. Villain in Stevenson's "Treasure Island"; c. Noted virago in the reign of Henry VIII.*
2. *You should answer: "To Tipperary."*
3. *a. Antidisestablishmentarianism; b. St. John, Chap. II, v.* 35; *c. Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogoch.*
4. *a.* 7 *hours,* 19 *minutes—between Andy Bowen and Jack Burke in* 1893; *b.* 10½ *seconds including a* 10*-second count; c.* 2 *hours,* 41 *minutes, between H and E Companies of* 2*nd Derbyshire Regiment.*
5. *a. A body of military explorers who specialised in sabotage behind the German lines during the last war;*
   b. G.H.Q. Cairo; moved by Auchinleck into the desert to take them away from the city fleshpots.
6. *a. London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art;*
   b. United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation;
   c. Private Secretary to the Permanent Under-Secretary of State.
7. 1,182 *miles—from Pensacola, Florida, to Fall River, Mass.*

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LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM

by Sean O'Faolain

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ENCHANTING! UNFORGETTABLE!

NEW SHORT NOVEL

I DON'T remember my first visits to that part of Ireland although my father often told me that since I was four years old I used to be sent there every year, sometimes twice a year. He was a ship's captain, my mother had died when I was three, and whenever he was at sea and no nearer relative could have me I would be sent off to the County Kildare.

The first visit I remember at all clearly was when I was ten, to my Uncle Gerry's farm near the town of Newbridge. I remember it because it was during this visit that Noreen Coogan pushed me into the Liffey. Noreen was the only child of my aunt's servant, Nancy Coogan; that year she must have been about twelve or thirteen. I remember myself standing dripping on the bank, crying miserably, and my uncle assuring me that Noreen—"The bold, bad slut!"—would be kept far away from me for the rest of the holidays; at which I began to wail more loudly than before, and he, guessing the state of my heart, began to laugh so loudly at me that I fairly bawled. After all, he had no children of his own and he must have realised how much Noreen meant to me.

In the end everything was fixed up to everybody's satisfaction. He sent me home in charge of Noreen, telling us both, with a total disregard for our moral education, to pretend to my aunt that I had slipped into the river and that nobody was to blame.

I have no clear image of what Noreen looked like at the time, or, indeed, at any later time. I was blinded by her beauty, or by what I believed to be her beauty; for she may not have been a pretty child at all.

All I have in my memory is a cloudy vision of corn-fair hair, and two large cornflower eyes, and for some reason or other I cannot get it out of my head that she had a complexion like sweet-peas. Perhaps I saw her at some time with a big bunch of cream-and-pink sweet-peas in her arms, or standing in a garden with a lot of sweet-peas in it and felt that the delicate blend of colours and scents was a perfect setting for her. Besides, what knowledge of feminine beauty can a boy have? I wonder whether the beauty of woman can ever be seen clearly and consciously for itself alone by anybody of any age, except by the professional painter and even he must in part see her beauty through his imagination.

A woman's beauty is associated with too many things besides the pleasure of the eye. The emotions evoked in men by the beauty of women are of their nature unstable. As you will see I outgrew my first beauty.

Anyway it is only a posthumous memory that describes the characters of childhood. It would falsify my experience to say such things as that Marky Fenelon, my uncle's stableman, was a small block of a man with a face that seemed to be entirely made of

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buttons—blackberry eyes, snub nose, tiny mouth, marbles of cheeks, tightly-wound ears, a crumpled chin. I did not see him like that because I did not really see him at all.

At that time I could not have told you that Nancy Coogan was a vigorous, bustling creature, with a gusty laugh, muscular arms always bared well above the elbow, a skirt that moved with the flick of a dancer, and so on. I was as little interested in noting her looks as I was in considering either her origin or her fate. These people were facts of nature to me. They had always been there; they would always be there.

It had been conveyed to me that Nancy and Marky were courting and would marry one day. So far as this meant anything to me it meant Never. Not that it can have meant much. I was so vague as to what marrying meant that when I was thirteen I much amused Nancy by asking her why some ladies are called Mrs. and some are called Miss. She laughed and said the misses are those who miss, which I thought very clever. Everything associated with those early visits was like that, both actual and dim, like the haze of heat softening the softness of the far meadows across the river or the swarms of gnats rising and sinking hazily over the reeds below the bridge.

One reason why Noreen and my clearer memories of Newbridge go together is that she focused those holidays for me. She was their one clear centre from which everything went outward and to which everything returned.

For after I was ten she became as certain and fixed a part of those visits as the excitement of the solitary journey in the train, which was always like the excitement of a voyager setting off for strange lands; or my first sight of the elongated Main Street of Newbridge, with the walls of the cavalry-barracks all along one side of it and the sutlers' shops all along the other; or the peaceful sound of the gun-wagons jingling along the dusty roads—they suddenly sounded less peaceful the year the Great War broke out; or the happy moment of arrival when I would run to meet Marky Fenelon in the wide, cobbled yard and at once hand him his ritual present of a pound of sailor's twist, bought for him by my father; or—one of the happiest moments of all—when I would run into the flagged kitchen to Nancy Coogan, Noreen's mummy, with her ritual present, which was always a lacy blouse bought in some port like Gibraltar or Naples or Genoa.

At the sight of me she would let out a welcoming roar of laughter, squash me up against her great, soft, bulging bosom, give me a smacking kiss and lift me, laughing and shrieking, high in the air until my head nearly touched the ceiling.

I suppose it was only natural that all my uncles and aunts, of whom I had a dozen, should mean more to me than my father, of whom I saw so very little. But Marky Fenelon and Nancy Coogan and Noreen Coogan were better than any aunt or uncle. When they talked they ignored me. When I talked they listened to me. When we all talked we talked in a bunch. We were equals.

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It was the year in which I asked my famous question about the difference between misses and missuses that I felt the first faintest, least stir of questioning interest in Nancy's and Marky's marathon courtship. It was really no more than an idle question and I had only a small interest in the answer. That day she was making soda-bread on the kitchen table and I was sitting up on the end of the table watching her knead and pound the dough.

" Nancy! " I said pertly. " What's up with you at all that you're not marrying Marky? When are you going to marry him? Marry him tomorrow, Nancy! Go on, Nancy! Will you marry him tomorrow? "

She let out one of her wild laughs and began to scrape the dough from her fingers and fling the scrapings down on the kneading-board, saying gaily with each flap of her hands, " This year! Next year! Sometime! Never! "

" Is it the way, Nancy, that you're not in love with Marky? "

This time her laughter was like a quarry-blast, as well it might be towards a young man of thirteen who did not yet know the difference between a Mrs. and a Miss.

" God love you, you poor child, that has nothing at all to do with it. It's just that he doesn't like having Noreen living with us. Now, go off and play with the cat for yourself! "

This extraordinary answer silenced me. I went out to the yard where Marky was mending a broken rain-barrel and I said crossly to him, " Marky, what's this I hear from Nancy about you? What have you against Noreen that you won't have her to live with ye when ye're married? "

I spoke so severely to him that he looked up at me with a bit of a smile. I think I must have spoken like an old parish priest upbraiding a backslider among his flock. The smile went. He turned in a surly manner, entirely new to me, to his spokeshave.

" Because I won't," he said shortly, " and that's the holy all of it. And you can tell that wan inside that she has no call to be talking about me behind my back."

This naturally sent me straight back to Nancy.

" Nancy, what has Marky against Noreen that he won't have her to live with ye when ye're married? "

" I thought I told you to go off and play with the cat? " she said crossly, and began to carve a deep cross on the surface of the flattened loaf.

But I was tired of the subject. I wanted to stab the dough myself and I began begging her to give me the knife. Anyway it all merely meant what I had always known, that they would all always be there waiting for me at the start of every holiday.

One reason why I know I was thirteen that year was that the next time I went to stay with Uncle Gerry I was fifteen, and this I know because I very soon found out that those two extra years made a great difference to all of us. What made the difference was that in my fourteenth year I spent a long summer spell with my three

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Feehan cousins, some seven or eight miles away from the Newbridge farm over on the plain of the Curragh. There I had another uncle, Ken Feehan, who had some sort of job in connection with the racecourse.

The Curragh is famous for two things, its racecourse on one side of the plain and on the other the extended military settlement which seems to outline the farthest edge of green with the long faint stroke of a red pencil. This settlement is still known as the Camp, long after its original tent-canvas has been transformed into barrack-squares in red brick, wooden huts, tin chapels, and tin shops. Sheltering belts of stunted firs have now been planted along its entire length to protect it from the bitter winds blowing down from the mountains whose slow drum-roll closes the view to the south-east.

From the door of my Uncle Ken's house, a long whitewashed cottage or bungalow near the grandstand, we looked south-east at the far-off red pencil-line across a rolling expanse of short grass empty except for a few cropping sheep, scattered tufts of furze, and an occasional car slowly beetling along the road that crosses the Curragh from Newbridge to the south.

It was an empty place for three girls to live in. It is also to the point that the plain is of great age. The couple of roads that cross it are the old woolpack roads into Danish Dublin. It is known that the distant finger of the round-tower of Kildare, to the west, was grey with age in the twelfth century. There was a racecourse here some two thousand years ago, and weapons of the stone age have been dug up in various parts of the plain.

I like to think of this silent antiquity whenever I think of Philly, the eldest of my three cousins, standing at night at the door of the cottage—it is the way I always remember her now—looking across at the only thing there that really interested her, the remote lights of the military camp. Whether the Camp had always excited her or not I do not know, but with the outbreak of the war everything about it did—the news of departing or arriving regiments, the crackle of gunfire from the pits, the distant flash of a heliograph on bright days, the faint sound of a bugle or a regimental band borne to us on the south-easterly wind. They filled her mind with images of all the handsome and brave young men fighting and falling on the plains of Flanders while she, from her cottage-door, looking across this Irish field, saw the flash, heard the gunfire or the bugle, inferred the beating of drums. She was eighteen, perhaps a few months over it.

I have no doubts at all about Philly's looks. She was not pretty but she was not plain. I grant that her nose was a bit peaky, her teeth slightly prominent, her figure almost skinny; but she had two lively brown eyes like an Italian girl, and her dark, shining hair was combed slick back from her prominent profile with the effect of a figurehead on a ship's prow.

Her lower lip was always moistened by her upper teeth, her hands were nervous, her laughter on a hairtrigger, her moods

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unpredictable and turning as rapidly as a trout in a stream; and she was a magnificent liar. This, I see, is as much an implication of her nature as a description of her appearance, but it is how she struck everybody who met her—an unflattering immediate impression dispelled completely in one second.

That I have no wish to do more than mention her two sisters, Moll and Una, may suggest further the force of her personality. She overshadowed them completely, although both of them were capable and pleasing girls. She bullied Moll all the time and she forced all the housework on her simply by refusing to do her own share of it. Poor Moll, a soft, rotund, pouting girl, was no match for her and never did anything in self-defence except complain feebly, weep a little, then laugh despairingly and with a wag of her bottom go on cheerfully with her double chores.

Philly did not need to bully Una, a gentle, fair-flaxen girl of about my own age—she was too young and delicate for bullying, cycled into Newbridge every day to school at the local convent, and studied endlessly when at home. I think she had realised very early that the cottage was a place to get out of as quickly as possible.

I liked the three of them but I far preferred Philly. She was more fun, and I liked the streak of boyish devilment in her that always made her ready for any escapade. I suppose she suffered me as being better company than none, and I also suppose that the main thing in my favour was that although a child to her eyes I was at least male. This is not merely an unkind remark. Her reputation had preceded my meeting with her. Back in Newbridge the general attitude to her was that she was a foolish virgin.

At the mention of her name my Uncle Gerry had just phewed out a long contemptuously good-humoured breath.

My aunt laughed at her. Once she made the witty and shrewd remark, "That girl has far too many beaux to her string."

Nancy sniffed mockingly, "That featherhead!" but she may have jealously compared her to her own adored Noreen.

Marky said, "Aha! A bold lassie!" Noreen was, by turns, respectfully and scornfully silent, but young as I was, I smelt envy.

As for her own sisters they admired her and feared her and did not love her. They assured me privately that her list of boys was as long as my arm. Their list included a rich trainer from the County Meath, a subaltern from the Camp, a jockey, a farmer from behind Kildare, a publican's son in Newbridge, a young lawyer from Dublin, even a stableboy from the stables of one of the wealthy trainers who, then as now, lived in half-timbered houses all around the edge of the plain behind white rails and clipped privet hedges.

I gathered that all of these beaux were met on race-days in the Enclosure, on the Members' stand, in the Restaurant, to all of which places, because of her father, she had complete access. There was more than a suggestion that she met her admirers on varying terms, playing whatever role pleased her fancy and suited their class. Certainly, in those days when everybody of her own class swarmed

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on the open plain outside the rails and only the comparatively few paid to go inside them, the daughter of an employee of the Turf Club would have had to present herself very well indeed to be accepted by a lieutenant, a lawyer, or a trainer.

What interested me far more, however, than her stratagems and deceptions, was the diversity of her beaux. Not that I then expressed my wonder in those words—I merely said " lieutenant " in a tone of admiration as if I was saying " salmon," and " jockey " in a voice of disgust as if I was saying " sprat." I could not understand how a girl who was so romantic, so ambitious, who made such constant use of the words *gentleman* and *lady* could move from the high level of war to the low level of the stable and back again.

I now realise that the foolish virgin imagined better than she knew, and better by far than I was to know for a good many years later. I see now that Philly Feehan was a revolving lighthouse casting out a special intuitive beam of light to each man's need. A lighthouse has no need of light for itself. It knows every point of the compass and owns none. There are many good women like that whose virtues partake of the vices of the courtesan.

I was torn this way and that by her. In loyalty to " Newbridge " I knew I should think her a figure of fun, and I could see that she was a little bully and a shrew, but she would sweep me off my feet whenever she started to talk about that Camp whose lights flickered at night across an empty plain. She turned it into a magic doorway to the world.

In Newbridge, everything, I have said, had been actual but hazy. When she talked to me about the real world, I heard Life begin to paw its stable floor.

" Listen, lad! When you grow up take the King's shilling! Be a soldier! See the world! " And then, with her wide, wild, white-toothed laugh, " Or, if it has to be, see the next world! "

I shall never have a dim or hazy notion of Philly Feehan as long as I remember the baking day when the four of us stood at the door of the cottage, the racecourse behind us as empty as a ballroom on the morning after a dance, the plain before us as empty as a bed at noon, and watched a small, slow cloud of dust move at marching-pace from the Camp towards the railway station at Kildare, and heard the clear rattle of the parting side-drums. She shocked us all by suddenly crying out with passion, her brown eyes fixed on the little creeping dust-cloud, her face pale under her shiny black coif, " I wish to heaven I was a bloody hussar! "

She taught me how to smoke. I drank my first beer with her in a hotel bar across the plain in Kilcullen. She gave me my first lesson in dancing. Looking back at her now I see why her type of girl was the ideal of the soldiers of the 1914 War.

They had been made to think of themselves as " boys." Their ideal woman was the young virgin, still with her hair down, The Flapper, a blend of devilment and innocence—their most highly-desired antithesis to rain-filled trenches, mud above their

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puttees, and shells whining and exploding over their heads all day long.

So, you can guess why my next visit to Newbridge was different from any that went before. I was now turned fifteen. Noreen was eighteen. The others were beyond the years. They behaved to me as always, but I was not the same with them. I had become wary.

It began the minute I arrived. When my Uncle Gerry drove the old tub-trap into the cobbled yard through the big tarred gates, opened by Marky immediately he heard the familiar clop of the pony coming along the road, I handed the ritual pound of twist over the side to Marky, alighted, asked the usual questions, said, " I suppose ye're not married yet? " and then, as if on an afterthought, " Oh, and how's our little Noreen these days? "

She must have done something to annoy him specially that day because he said grimly and shortly, " Oh, very well, I believe! A bit rakish. Now and again! But very well. In the best of health."

I was alert at once.

" In what way rakish, Marky? " I laughed innocently.

" Ah! " He shook his head upward. If he had been a horse I would have heard the rattle of the bit and seen the yellow teeth. " I suppose it might be through having no father to keep her in order."

I nodded in sage agreement.

" How long is it now, Marky, since he died? "

He was untackling the pony, detaching the traces from the hames, his face against the pony's neck, but though I could not see him I knew from his voice that he was not going to pursue the subject. " Well! " he growled into the pony's neck. " It was all a long time ago. Nancy's inside expecting you."

He could hardly have said it plainer. I went indoors to her and produced the usual Italian blouse. She hugged me and kissed me, but I was too grown-up now to be lifted to the ceiling, and I hugged her back hard and thought she had fine eyes and was a damn handsome woman yet.

Finally I said it, " And how's Noreen these days? "

She turned back to the table and gently lifted the white silk blouse and said in a thick, cosy voice, " 'Tis lovely. 'Twill suit Noreen down to the ground."

" But," I protested, " it's for you! My father sent it for you."

" Tshah! What do I want with finery? I'm gone beyond fineries. But—" smiling fondly, and lifting up the blouse again by the points of the shoulders to look it all over—" Noreen will look a masher in that."

No age is at once so insensitive and so sensitive as adolescence. It is one reason why young people are so exasperating to adults. I looked at her with curiosity, oblivious of her maternal devotion, and elegantly leaning against the table I ventured, " Nancy! If you were married the three of ye would be

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as happy as three kittens in a basket. And Marky would be a father to Noreen."

She dropped the blouse in a silken heap, gave me a sharp look, and flounced to the fireplace.

"Noreen," she said to the range, banging in the damper, "doesn't want him as long as she has me. Anyway, since he won't have both of us he can have neither of us. Have you seen your aunt yet? She'll be expecting you."

The flick of her skirt frightened me. I did not know what I had touched but it felt red-hot. All I knew was that this prolonged courtship of theirs was on the rocks.

All the same I noticed that she still paid Marky attentions that she never yielded to the other men on the farm; such as his special mug of tea every morning and every afternoon, with a slab of her homemade currant-bread, butter, and gooseberry jam. That July he took her out one night to Duffy's Circus. Another night my uncle, seeing that my aunt was serving us, asked "Is Nancy out?" to which she replied that Marky and she had gone to Benediction at the priory, with a little smirk that made me think of things far removed from priories and prayers.

That first day I did not run down the road in search of Noreen as I would have done two years before. I walked down to where Coshea's boreen comes out on River Road and I came on her there, beyond the laundry, leaning over the wall, showing the hollow backs of her knees, chewing a bit of straw, looking across the river at the meadows and the Dublin road beyond them. I stole up behind her, slipped my arm about her waist and said gaily, "Hullo, Sis!"

She just glanced at me. "Do you mind removing your arm?"

"Oho!" Very loftily. "Touch me not, eh?"

I was so mad I could have spat in her eye, but I pretended nothing—I would not give her that much satisfaction. Instead, I started chatting away about what I had been doing since I saw her two summers ago. She kept chewing the straw and looking idly across the river.

I do not remember what precisely I said that made her begin to pay heed to me except that it was my idea of a gentle probe about Marky and her mother, but it made her give me a slow, mocking smile that said—as plainly and scornfully as if she had spoken the actual words—that I had surprised her, but that I knew nothing, not only about Marky and her mammy but about Everything in General, and that I could bloody well stop pumping her and go away and find it all out for myself the way she had done.

She conveyed it silently. Women do not talk to small boys.

If I had had any pride I would have walked away from her. But at fifteen years and three months you are so frantic to know all about Everything in General that you have no pride, only lots of cunning.

I said, very sadly, "I suppose, Noreen, you think I'm only a kid?"

"How old are you?" she asked, with just a faint touch of sympathy in her voice.

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" Going on to sixteen. But everybody," I said bitterly, " talks to me as if I was still ten. Have a fag? "

I flashed out my new mock-silver cigarette-case. I observed with satisfaction the way she glanced down the road towards the bridge and the end of the Main Street, and then turned and leaned her back on the wall and glanced idly up Cat Lane before saying in a bored voice, " I suppose, really, I might as well."

I noted also that she smoked the way all girls smoke who are not smokers, continually corking and uncorking her mouth. I kept up the role of downtrodden youth.

" 'Tis well for you, Noreen. I only wish I was eighteen. You can do what you like. My dad would leather hell out of me if he caught me smoking. The way he talks to me about my stamina and my muscles you'd think he wants me to be another Jack Dempsey. Would Nancy be cross with you? "

" I'd like to see her! " she boasted.

" I know a girl in Dublin who smokes thirty a day."

This was too much for her.

" You know nothing about girls! "

" Oho! We grow up fast in Dublin! "

I blew smoke down my nose and turned round and leaned over the river-wall and spat in the river. She also turned and blew smoke down her nose and spat in the river. For a moment or two she looked across at the golden meadows. Then, " I'm engaged to be married."

I was shocked upright.

" You can't be! Not at eighteen! You're too young! "

" I won't get married for a year or two, of course. But I'll get married when I'm twenty. You don't think I'm going to hang around here tied to my ma's apronstrings all my bloomin' life? "

" Where's your engagement ring? "

" It's a secret yet," she said, with another slow, hot look.

I looked at her for a while, torn between disbelief and a disappointment that had something in it of despair. Then I let my cigarette fall into the river. It was like a fellow throwing down his gun.

She said, " Come on and we'll walk down by the weirs."

I walked by her side until we came to a hawthorn in full spate, listening to her telling me all about her boy. He was a sergeant on the Curragh. He cycled over from the Camp whenever he was off duty and she went out to meet him halfway. He was not going to remain a sergeant for long; he was " going for an officer " and when he got his commission they would live in London. I asked her if Nancy knew about all this. It was the only thing I said that upset her.

" If you say one word to her," she threatened, " I'll cut the thripes out of you."

After a bit I risked saying, " If he saw us together now would he be jealous? "

She was pleased to laugh condescendingly.

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" It might be as well if he wasn't too sure of me."

She began to tell me more about the Camp and the Curragh, what a wonderful place it was, with all the rich officers, and rich trainers, and big racing-stables, and big owners, and their big houses. She seemed to know as much about all these people as Philly herself. She even seemed to know more about the life inside the Camp: the big dances, the regimental dinners off plates of solid silver; polo in the summer; football and rugby the year round.

And she drowned me with talk of the life she would have after she was married until I became mad with jealousy. Do you doubt it? Even if I *was* only fifteen and three months? Dear Heaven! Does nobody in the world know how old it is to be fifteen and three months?

Whenever now I see a group of boys returning, say after holidays, to school, of any age between twelve and eighteen, I look carefully into their faces in search of eyes that correspond to my unalterable concept of fifteen and three months.

I look at myself through those eyes. I see my own frustration in them. For how can anybody who has to come close to them not feel their helplessness?

Each of them is imprisoned in childhood and no one can tell him how to escape. Each of them must, with blind eyes, gnaw his way out, secretly and unaided. At certain moments all through our lives we touch a point where ignorance is teetering on the brink of some essential revelation which we fear as much as we need it. These brinks, these barriers, these *No Road* signs recur and recur. They produce our most exhausting and hateful dreams. They tell us every time that we have to be born all over again, grow, change, free ourselves yet once again. The particular tenderness attaching to the age which I call fifteen-and-three-months is that it is the first of many such steps and trials and must affect the nature of all that follow.

Since that July I have been in love half a dozen times, but I have never felt anything since like the tearing torment of those few weeks of summer. How I used to flatter this girl in whom I could not even then fully believe and should never have trusted, merely to be allowed to sit beside her and secretly feel the edge of her skirt!

" And does he take you to many dances, Noreen? But where do you get the dresses? I'd love to see you dressed for a dance! You must look smashing! But where do you get this little card that you write the dances on? Did you say that it is a pink pencil that's attached to it? By a pink thread? You didn't *really* mean, did you, Noreen, that they have *six* wine-glasses? "

Her least word could crush me like a moth. But from that summer on she had a power over all of us that was like a tyrant's.

One night when Nancy flounced in with the supper and banged down the teapot, and whisked out again with a flick of her tail, my uncle said crossly, " What's up with that one now? "—implying that things had been " up with " her before now.

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My aunt shot a glance at me and said, " Our ladyship is gone to the pictures by herself. And Marky is gone to a whist drive."

I wonder they didn't notice me. Cinema, indeed! I saw the road to the Curragh, dark, secret, scented. Thinking of that sergeant I must have had eyes like two revolvers.

Yet I never realised the extent of Nancy's miseries and suspicions until, one day, she frightened me by saying, " What are you always mooning about for by yourself? You have no life in you at all this year. Was it you I saw wandering out the road by yourself the other night? "

I knew then that she also had been wandering along the roads at dark, looking for Noreen.

For three whole despairing weeks I did not see Noreen at all. Then, quite suddenly, one Sunday morning I collapsed at Mass. My uncle's doctor diagnosed my illness as acute anaemia but I am satisfied now that it was a traumatic illness. On August the ninth I was sent home. My father got three months' leave to be near me and I remained at home under his care for the rest of the summer and most of the autumn.

When, towards the end of October, I began to get a bit brighter in myself, I am sure that what really cheered me up was my father's suggestion that when he went back to his ship I should go to the Feehans and he would join me there for Christmas with his brother Kenneth, whom he had not seen for some years. I argued to myself that Newbridge would be only a few miles away and that I could more tactfully spy out the land from the slopes of the Curragh. As it happened, things turned out very differently from the way I expected.

I had not reckoned with the weather. To understand this you should see the place as I did that November. In the winter the Curragh seems older and wider. The foggy air extends its size by concealing its boundaries. The grass is amber, as if with great age. It is speckled all over with the skeletons of thistles. Whenever the rain blows down from the mountains, in veil after veil, advancing unopposed across the shelterless plain, one becomes immobilised.

That winter life in the cottage became as restricted as life aboard a ship. The hours were twice as long. It was dusk soon after three. For one week in November a sprinkle of snow fell almost every day so that all the bottoms were white and the crowns of their slopes were green, reversing the order of the colours on the billows of an ocean. At dusk when I would look across the wintry sheen towards the brown line of the Camp, its first lights gleaming, the whole plain seemed to surge against a cliff. Only the lights of a travelling car would restore to the earth its natural solidity.

On most days there was little to do but watch the horses at the morning try-outs, or, if it was dry enough, cross over to the Camp.

Whenever the air cleared it was always Philly who proposed that the two of us should walk across to the Camp—no other walk appealed to her—even if we did nothing when we got there except

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buy some trifle at the Stores, such as the latest copy of *The Strand* or the *Red Magazine*, or, if she had the money, she might treat herself to a small bottle of scent. Her favourite, I remember, was some allegedly oriental perfume called Phul-Nana. We might go into the red-painted tin chapel, its candles as calm as light that has gone to sleep, its tin roof creaking faintly in the wind.

I had always thought the Camp a bleak and empty place, but during that winter it was as blank and cold as a plate of sheet-iron, and as silent as a factory-building before the machinery is installed. One wondered where all the soldiers were, what they could be doing.

All one saw was a sentry stamping up and down, a couple of men in khaki twill lugging a refuse bin or a tin of swill across a square, a nursemaid pushing a perambulator swiftly before her, its hood up, the waterproof covering fastened halfway across the opening. It was so silent that it was startling to hear a lorry zooming up the hill towards the tower with its Union Jack streaming. And after the lorry had passed into the Camp there was a ghostliness about the long tracks that it had left on the slight snow. Noreen had said that " all the fun " took place here in the winter.

When I asked Philly where all the fun was she said crossly that it all took place at night. But we never went to the Camp at night, never saw anything of its night-life except its flickering yellowness along the bruised horizon. I could only imagine, or over-imagine, its supposed liveliness at those hours when she and I would stand in the porch of the cottage gazing fixedly at that yellow flickering until the cold defeated her curiosity and desire.

But we must all at some time or other have felt this illusory appeal of what I call The Lighted Window, when walking alone at night in some strange city; illusory, because if the lonely stranger could enter these lighted rooms he would lose the sense of their romance in the sense of their homeliness; and the sense of their cosiness would gradually vanish with the sense of the cold outside.

If there is any moral in this it has, I think, little to do with fancy as the enemy of reality. It has to do, rather, with the difference between two orders of reality. The Lighted Window excites us imaginatively to seek some sort of integration between our various or separate selves; the actual room behind the yellow blind breaks this process of integration. The friendly fireside outshines the fire of the imagination. Were Philly and I trying to integrate ourselves, staring at those flickering lights?

All I know is that I enjoyed standing beside her, under the porch, covered in summer by sweetbriars, watching these distant fireflies, sometimes talking, sometimes hardly speaking at all. For without at the time being aware that I was perceiving anything, I was in some fashion aware that the years between us had dwindled since we were last together. Then I was fourteen, she was eighteen. Now that she was twenty and I was on the brink of sixteen I was no longer divided from her by childhood. This feeling came to me very gradually.

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At first she seemed to take no more pleasure or interest in me or in my affairs than if I was Moll or the cat. Then, by degrees, she began to converse more seriously with me. Perhaps it was because she was bored. Perhaps it was because I no longer felt obliged by my loyalty to " Newbridge " to think of her as a comic figure, and therefore felt a greater sympathy with her. She impressed me in various ways.

I noted the books she was reading—histories, travel books, famous biographies. The season induced her to do something else that she had never done during the summer: to practise on the old upright piano with its pale green, fluted satin shining behind its mahogany fretwork. Its strings sounded very tinkly during that snowy week. During the thaw they jangled. It was a wholly new experience for me to see her contemptuously throw aside Moll's popular songs, and bid me severely to sit quietly and listen while she played Grieg or Mendelssohn.

One night I found her reading, pencil in hand, and asked, " What's the book? " It was Moran's French Grammar. She was trying unaided to learn the language. She borrowed most of these books from a widow, much older than herself, living in Kildare, a colonel's widow whom she had met by chance at one of the meetings on the Curragh.

After I had heard about the colonel's widow I guessed, with the diabolical shrewdness of fifteen-plus, that she was playing, for me, the part of a woman of a certain age with nothing left for her to do but to encourage a young man who still had the world before him.

This pretending to be older and wiser than she was led her into a miscalculation which worked quite the other way. She allowed the dramatic exaggeration of the difference in our ages to lead her into unguarded moods. When a passionate sigh, a toss of the smooth, dark head, or a deliberate profanity would lead her to some story which would expose her hand, I quietly read the hand and, excited by what I saw, in my excitement encouraged her without guile. The result was inevitable: unsuspected and unobserved self-revelations on both sides of the parlour fire. I forgot Noreen Coogan as utterly as if she had never existed.

She first realised how far she had lowered her defences the night when, as we sat alone over the parlour fire—Moll was singing in the kitchen, Uncle Ken in bed with his rheumatics, and Una studying in her bedroom—I looked at her and said, in a tone of voice with which I hoped her older admirers had made her familiar, " Philly, you have lovely hair. I'm sorry you put it up since I was here before. I'd love to see you letting it all down your back."

I knew by the start she gave and the abrupt way she said, " My hair is all right," that she had recognised the tone. When I kept looking at her with a curved smile and lowering eyes I was gratified to see the frightened look in her eyes. It meant that I was able to interest her not as a boy but as a man, so that I was merely amused to see Philly trying to flounder back quickly to the role of the grown woman talking graciously to the young boy.

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She only succeeded in getting herself into greater difficulties: as when she insisted that I should do some study, began to plan it out for me, tried to spur me on, explaining maternally that ambition and study go hand in hand, and so on. The result was that she found herself obliged to be patient beyond her natural temperament whenever she found me sulky or resistant.

I was content with this new arrangement for about a week. That is to say, I played the role of the sixteen-year-old pupil with a twenty-year-old teacher who knows that he is attracted by her, but who feels that it is her duty to keep him in his place as it is her pleasure to hold his admiration.

Suddenly I got tired of it. One night, in a temper at some correction she had made, I shut the book with a bang, glared at her, and said that I preferred to work alone.

"But," she smiled sweetly, "I only want to help you!"

"I don't want you to *help* me!" I cried haughtily.

"Believe me, my child," she said sarcastically, "you need a great deal of help."

"Not from you!" I retorted.

"Master Knowall!"

"And I'm not a child!"

"You are a schoolboy."

I screamed at her, "I'm not, I'm not. I'm not."

She flew into a rage herself. "Be quiet! Remember that if you can't behave yourself you can't stay here!"

I swept the books from the table, and raced out of the parlour and the cottage, into the garden, and so through the wicket-gate straight on to the darkness and emptiness of the plain.

It was one of those pet nights of winter that we often get in Ireland when the air is so soft that it might be a night of spring. The wind was blowing with a large envelopment of humid warmth as I walked straight in front of me towards the distant Camp.

I was full of anger as a man might be full of alcohol; that anger of resentment which makes young people cry at the very injustice of being born, and turn all their frustration easily and often on their fathers or mothers, not, we may agree, without logical reason. I feebly turned my bitterness on her, but only feebly.

It gradually died as the exhaustion induced by constant stumbling in the dark, the splendour of the starry sky, the magnitude of the plain, the softness of the night air worked on me so soothingly that I began to think of her not with anger but with a feeling of something like grateful admiration mingled with an undefined impersonal fear of loss.

I lay down under the shelter of a furze-clump from whose lee I could see the light of the cottage away off to one side of the plain, and the sparse lights of the Camp much nearer on the other side. For a long time I lay there on my elbow looking at the far-off cottage lights. I thought I heard the distant coughing of a sheep; then I realised that what I was hearing was the wind rattling through some withered thistles near my feet. Beyond the dark hump of

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furze I made out in the starry sky the shape of the Dragon, and over that the pole star, and, when I leaned back, high in the zenith, directly over my head, the Charioteer.

It was an exciting night-sky. The washing wind, and the stars, and the darkness and the size of the plain dwindled me and isolated me. My isolation turned all these human and skyborne lights into my guides and companions. My head rolled to the north to the lone cottage, to the south to the wind-washed camp fires, and looked straight up to the Charioteer.

I remember shouting out in my excitement without knowing what I meant, "The lights! The lights!" as if I wanted some pyrotechnic convulsion in nature to occur, some flashing voice to speak. Only the wind whispered, and the dried thistles coughed. I knew that I must be the one who should say the releasing word.

Philly told me afterwards that when Moll came into the parlour, after I had run out, asking what it was all about, and was told, she had tossed her head and said, "What he needs is a stick on the bottom! If Daddy heard of his temper he'd soon tame the brat." And Philly confessed that her own first feeling had been the wish that she had a brother who would leather hell out of me. But as eleven o'clock passed, and midnight, and I had not yet returned, she began to feel that she had been curt and hurtful, especially when she had called me a schoolboy. She went to bed, filled with remorse and pity, leaving Moll to wait up for me.

Some time after midnight she heard Moll open the door and speak sharply to me. I did not reply—I went to my bedroom at the end of the tiny corridor. Moll went off grumbling to bed, and soon the whole cottage was quiet, and all she could have heard was the sweetbriar squeaking over the porch.

She would have heard her door being opened. She must have thought it was Moll, because she said nothing. I heard her gasp when my hand fell on her bare arm, and I whispered, "It's me, Philly."

She sat up, whispering, "What's wrong?" and I heard her fumbling with the matches.

"Don't light a light!" I begged.

"What is wrong?" she whispered again, and the rest of our talk was carried on in the same whispering, in the same dark.

"Philly, I don't want to fight with you."

"That's all right, we both lost our tempers."

"I'm very fond of you, Philly."

"So am I, of you. Good night, now."

"But I'm not a schoolboy."

"Yes, yes. Go to your room now. Daddy will be raging if he hears you."

"Philly! You are a grown woman. And I am *not* a boy."

"I only said it to tease you."

"Philly!"

I could feel my heart pounding.

"Yes?"

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" Kiss me! "

" If you don't go back to bed at once I will call Moll."

" If you don't kiss me I'll run out of the house and never come back again. Never! Never again! "

Now she whispered, " If I give you one kiss will you go right back to bed? "

I still feel that kiss, my first kiss, the parted lips, the gateways of the world opening, the stars over the plain shivering, the wind blowing, and her terror as she said, " Now go! "

" Another! "

She struck a match, lit her candle, and saw me in my trousers, shirt, and bare feet. She started to upbraid me, but I saw that she saw at a glance that she was no longer dealing with a boy. She was not looking at me as a boy nor speaking to me as a boy. I sat on the side of her bed, filled with wonder and delight at her bare shoulders and her dark, shining hair down about them.

She gripped my hand and she assured me that in future I would have to keep to myself or leave the house, that she knew now that she had been stupid and foolish to have treated me as a boy, because any woman should have known better, but that she understood now and she hoped I understood, so would I please realise that I was a man and behave like a man; and as she whispered like this, so seriously, I stroked her bare forearm, and felt the trembling of it and the weakness entering into it, and so must she because she stretched out her clenched knuckles to the wall.

" I am going to call Moll! "

" Just one last kiss? " I begged, staring at the whiteness of her neck and bosom.

Still holding her knuckles to the wall, " On your word of honour, you will go then? "

" On my word of honour."

When we parted, two hours later, she upbraided me with a gentleness that affected me far more than anything else that had happened since our quarrel in the parlour.

I lay awake until I heard the cock crowing. I felt no triumph. My delight was chastened by its own wonder. If she thought that I was in love with her she was deluded. I was too supremely astonished by my adventure to be fully aware of her. I saw vistas of wonder opening before me, reflecting the light of a strange sky, and drowned trees and lowering clouds, and in the distance of this protracted perspective I saw a small replicated figure that seemed of all human beings to be most like myself. When we met in the morning I looked at her as if she was a mirror and I did not recognise myself in her altered attitude to me.

Totally unaware that her ignorance was fully equal to my own, unaware that what appealed to her in me was my youthfulness and my ignorance, taking her to be a woman who had seen strange places, known strange people, heard strange things that I had never seen, known, or heard, fearing that she was aware only of my utter inexperience, I behaved unnaturally and selfconsciously, hurting

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her cruelly by what I considered were the proper airs of any man of the world on such occasions. I spoke coolly to her, smiled cynically, once I even winked at her. Whatever I did I knew that I must conceal from her my shameful innocence for, during those two hours, lying close together, we had been as harmless as doves, as innocent as lambs simply because I—as I thought then, but as I see now both of us—had not known what else to do.

Besides, I now needed above everything else a retirement into silence, secrecy, self-contemplation, spiritual digestion, a summoning of shocked resources. I put on my cap after breakfast, borrowed one of my uncle's walking-sticks, put a cigarette into the side of my mouth, waved a "Tol-lol!" to the three girls and spent the whole day wandering, blind and lost, about the back-roads that lead into the great central bog-land of Ireland, that vast earth-lake of purple heather, brown bog-pools, and black peat. You might tramp all day over these bogs and hear nothing stirring except a rising snipe, see nothing but a sloping pillar of blue peat-smoke far away—some remote turf-cutter brewing himself a can of tea.

This lostness, this flatness, this emptiness as of a desert suited my sense of lostness. I had no wish to arrive anywhere. I wanted to remain undestined. All I wanted was that my lost self should return to me.

In much the same spirit I so obviously avoided every chance of being alone with her that she must, surely, have begun to ask herself,

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" Does he loathe the sight of me? " just as I kept saying to myself, " Does she despise me now? Did it really happen at all? Did she upbraid me, and push me away and draw me towards her again and again? " At least my awe began to de-fog. Passing her in the little corridor one afternoon I gripped her hand and said, " Tonight?"

She nodded, to my astonishment burst into tears, and slipped from me into her room.

That night the barriers rose between us at once. I was frightened by her silence into silence. I was repelled, even disgusted by the stuffiness of the room, the smelly candle, the tousled bed, our humiliating stealth. We gripped one another at every creak, lying rigid to listen. I could have cried for rage when I was alone again. Our public behaviour became correspondingly gracious. It was of what I would now call a Byzantine formality, a mandarin formality. My manner would not have shamed a grand seigneur; hers a princess. There also began between us a series of long, maundering talks about love and marriage which could come to no conclusion, which indeed could hardly have made sense since each of us was trying to instruct the other without exposing the fact that we had nothing whatever to reveal.

Sometimes I rose from these gentle discussions feeling refreshed and clarified. The effect would vanish in an instant when I would see her going through the house flip-flop in slippers, heels red, without stockings, calves goose-fleshed; kicking the cat in a temper; telling some petty lie to her father; or meanly dodging the task of helping Moll to peel the potatoes. It would then occur to me that she must find similar imperfections in me and inwardly I would say, in shame and horror, " *Does* she? "

The fact is, we both had within us the same monstrous weapon of destruction. She had imagined too many romantic stories; I had imagined too luxuriantly; both of us had imagined outside ourselves. Fountains and flowers were elsewhere, always elsewhere, under the Himalayas, an eye-cast across the Plain. So, when I asked her about those wonderful winter dances in the Camp and she admitted that she had not yet been to one, and I thought at once of Noreen who had been there to dances several times, the thought had no sequence unfavourable to her because, after all, Noreen had gone there with a mere sergeant whereas Philly had met a real lieutenant at the races.

Still, there was some sense of disappointment. Philly's lighthouse was not giving me the light it used to give. What had attracted me in her was her daring, her masterfulness, the flare that said, " This way to the open sea! " I could not avoid seeing that we had both suddenly become dependent: on this cottage to which we had once turned our backs to look at the lights across the plain, on my uncle, on my father, on the few shillings that they yielded us for pocket-money, on the stuffy little timber-lined room with the chamber-pot under the bed, the varnish blistered from the summer heat, and one corner of the ceiling damp.

The day she clutched me and said miserably, " Do you love me

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at all?" I realised that she had become dependent on me. My father came next day. I immediately asked him if I might go to the farm at Newbridge for Christmas, and I went there that evening.

It was like going out of a dim room into morning sunshine. I saw everything clearly. They had all been right about Philly. She was a silly girl, her head full of vapourings and nonsense.

I no sooner mentioned the Camp to Noreen than she at once made me see it for what it was. While I had been at the cottage looking at the lights of the Camp she had cycled there to two dances and she described them to me fully and simply. There was nothing now about pink cards, and pink pencils, and six wine-glasses; and when I cried, "But you *told* me!" she only laughed and said she had been making fun of me; that sort of thing might happen in the officers' mess on a special occasion, such as a big dinner-dance—she was not certain because she had never been to such an event—but I surely did not think that it was the form at the sergeants' mess? She said that if I wanted badly to take her to a dance there, her man would arrange it.

Within an hour I was under her spell again. She seemed to me more beautiful than ever. She was the actuality of what I had wished Philly to be. But it was not only her beauty that held me now—that cumulus-cloud of light about her head, those full lips and cheeks the colour of a pale tea-rose, her body that was just beginning to take on something of her mother's plump strength. Her real attraction for me now was her blunt matter-of-factness, her wilfulness which produced more and more sighs from my aunt, and frowns from my uncle, and growls from Marky, and—a thing I could never have expected—a sudden flood of tears from Nancy on the only occasion that she talked about her.

"But why?" I asked my uncle. "Why?"

The solemnly pitying look he gave me said more than his words, "Nancy gave up a great deal for that girl. I warned her! But nobody can save a mother from herself."

I discussed it with Marky.

"But people have to grow up!" I protested to him. "Noreen must be near twenty."

"I foresaw it," he growled. "And I was right."

None of them understood her. And yet I could sympathise with them because there were times when I almost hated her myself, so greatly did I need her, and so well did she know it, and so ruthlessly did she exact the price of my need, day after day. Her price was power and the constant acknowledgment of it.

When Noreen started again to dodge me for days it was solely, I knew, for the pleasure of making me realise how essential she was to me. I realised it only too well. For I was now at that stage of my development which I was to recognise poignantly, years after, in a letter by John Keats wherein he compares life to a large house whose first room is a happy thoughtlessness, whose second is full of the light and wonder of primal understanding, but all of whose other

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rooms have to be explored down dark and frightening passages. I had come to the chamber of lights and wonders. I could not explore beyond it alone.

Within two weeks the pattern of the previous summer began to repeat itself; one day made radiant by her company followed by three without her, so miserably blank by comparison that I could imagine that she had plotted the contrast; appointments made only to be broken; or kept briefly and summarily interrupted. It would not have been so humiliating if she had made it clear to me that I was only a foil or a fill-in for her sergeant; but there were days when she treated me as much more than that; and then, without warning, she would slap me down with those damned three years between us.

I had spent six whole, empty days cycling around the country in hopeless search of her. On the afternoon of that fateful seventh day, just as the first suggestion of twilight was entering the chilly air, I turned down one of those aimless side-lanes that lead under the railway towards the level bog. I had come there across the Curragh, and after the open plain, cropped as close as a tennis-lawn, this hollowed lane, deep under trees slung like hammocks from ditch to ditch, gave me a queer feeling of enclosure, secrecy, and remoteness. I had been there once before during the summer, also in search of her, and I had then got exactly the same labyrinthine feeling that I was going into some dark, secret, scented underground to listen to the rumbling mutter of some obscure confessor or sybil.

That summer day the lane had been a pool of tropical heat, a clot of mingled smells from the overgrown ditches teeming thickly with devil's bread, meadowsweet, loose-strife, cow-eyed daisies, greasy buttercups, purple scabious, great rusty stalks of dock, briars hooped like barbed-wire, drooping hawksbeard. This wintry evening these flowers and weeds were now a damp catacomb of shrunken bones. The fallen leaves were squashy. The arms of the trees were darkly shrunken against the lowering sky.

Once a bird scrabbled. Otherwise there was not the least sound. It became almost dark where the lane descended under a stone railway-bridge before emerging to end at a wooden gate, grey and worm-eaten, leading out to the bog, now so vague in the half light that all I saw of it clearly was the occasional eye of a pool catching the last gleams from the watery sky.

She stood with her back to me, leaning over the old gate, gazing out over the bog. She started when she heard my step. My heart was battering, but I managed to say, with a pretence of gaiety, "Hullo, Noreen! Waiting for your beau?"

"And what if I am, nosey?"

"Oho! Nothing at all! Is he letting you down tonight?"

For a second she seemed to bend and slacken, and I relished the sight. She recovered herself, with a wicked grin.

"You can be my beau tonight. You're not so awful-looking. You'd pass in a crowd, I suppose."

I had leaned idly against the gate. I was wearing my school cap.

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She took it off, threw it on the ground, and brushed back my hair with her palm. In a brighter gleam flitting through the clouds, a bog-pool glinted greenly behind her shoulder. The smells of the dank vegetation grew thicker. My breath came faster.

"You know, kid, if you did your hair properly . . . Have you no sweetie of your own?"

"Yes!" I said. "Up in Dublin."

"What's she like?"

I could only think of Philly, red-eyed from weeping. But I could not talk about her to a girl who was going to marry a sergeant who would soon take his commission as an officer and carry her off to England, a married woman. I shook my head dumbly and stared into her blue eyes.

"Well," she said impatiently, "what does *she* say to you when you walk her out? What do you say to her?" She suddenly dragged my arm behind her waist. "Here! Suppose I was her, what would I be saying to you now?" I shivered at her touch. "Go on!" she mocked.

"I don't think you'd say anything. You'd just look at me."

She looked at me sidewards and upwards from under droopy lids.

"This way?"

"No!" I said furiously. "More like . . . I dunno how! More like a sheep."

She detached my arm irritably. Then she laughed at me pitilessly. Peremptorily she put my arm back again around her waist.

"You're a very timid courter. Say something to me. As if I was your girl."

I whispered, seeing her cloud of flaxen hair against a pale star, "You're like an angel, Noreen."

She sighed a happy sigh that was almost a groan. She looked with heavy eyelids past me up the dark tunnel.

"'Tis like the pictures," she said sleepily. "Go on."

"I could pray to you, Noreen."

"Go on," she murmured throatily, leaning against me.

"When I see the sun through the window in the Priory I think of you, Noreen."

Her eyes were closed. She muttered, as if barely awake, "Why does nobody talk to me like that?"

"Doesn't your sergeant?"

She opened her eyes wide, blue-sky-wide, and stared at me enormously.

"What window?"

"The window of Mary Magdalene with the long golden hair."

She pushed me away and roared laughing at me; perhaps, I now think, at the pair of us; and was there, I have sometimes wondered, a bitterness in her laughing?

"Honest to God you're a scream!" She quietened and looked seriously at me. "You poor little bastard!" she said. "I don't

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know what I'm going to do with you." She really did seem to be considering the problem, so that I felt a great warmth of happiness that she should be thinking kindly about me even if she was a grown woman and even if she still thought I was only a boy.

Then she stiffened suddenly, and shoved me away. She had lifted her head like a bird that hears a warning screech from its mate.

"Hop it!" she rapped at me. "Clear out!" and began to clamber over the gate into the field beyond.

It did not occur to me to disobey. In a daze of shame I went slowly back up the lane to where I had thrown my bicycle against the ditch. Only when I was on the road did I remember my cap, and laying the bicycle aside I went back for it, thinking she had run off into the field beyond the gate.

As I came to the bridge I saw them on the other side of the gate, framed by the stone arch, in one another's arms, their mouths locked. Knowledge turned me into a statue. He was not a sergeant. He was not even a private soldier. He was a little buttoned-up lump of a fellow with a coarse cap on his head peaked upward so that what there was left of salvaged daylight on his little horse's face made me realise that he could only be a stableman like Marky Fenelon. As I stood there, petrified, his fist clutched her yellow mop and slowly dragged her head backward. Her mouth fell open like a cat's red gullet yawning widely.

I slunk into the ditch. Then I crept away up the lane, jumped on my bicycle, and rode off like a madman. Behind me, far away across the plain, a bugle began to unfold its gay elaborate call. As it came and died away I was aware of stars glinting through bare trees, and I imagined illusory lights of the Camp flickering in the wind that silenced the bugler's notes, and I thought of them also not as lights but as lies.

Yet I did not feel anger, or disgust, I did not feel deceived, or betrayed, or derided. I felt only a hollow in me full of defeat, of total failure, now and for ever after. It was a secret moment. Nobody knew it. Nobody would ever know it.

But as I rode through the Main Street of Newbridge, along one side of which the shops were now lighted, and saw the girls already parading the pavement, the soldiers coming out of the barracks across the street, in twos and threes, for a night's pleasure, I kept my head lowered over the handlebars, as if I was afraid that somebody would recognise me, or guess my shame in my knowledge of my defeat, see my fear at the discovery of my own helpless loneliness.

You think I am making a great fuss about nothing? Is it nothing when a prisoner who has been painfully burrowing his way out of his cell climbs triumphantly out of his tunnel into another cell to find his gaoler leaning in a corner grinning at him?

I had wanted to know what there is to know; to possess life and be its master. The moment I found out that nobody knows I had exposed myself to myself. I would never do it again. The shame of it was too much to bear. Like everybody else I would pretend

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for the rest of my life. I would compound. I would invent—poetry, religion, commonsense, kindness, good cheer, the sight, the laugh, the shrug, everything that saves us from having to admit that beauty and goodness exist here only for as long as we create and nourish them by the force of our dreams; that there is nothing outside ourselves apart from them.

I rode home. I was in nice time for supper. My uncle said, "That's a fine complexion you have. Been cycling?"

"It was a grand day for it!" I smiled. "And a grand night of stars."

The next morning as I passed the gate-lodge, Noreen came out and with one of her slow, smiling looks, as of a fellow-conspirator, she handed me my cap, wet, crumpled, and muddy. When I unfolded it I found the silver track of a snail across the lining. I let it fall into the Liffey where it slowly floated away.

I did not go down there again for a couple of years, and by then I was doing Medicine at the university. When my Uncle Gerry met me at the station he laughed loudly, "By Gor, John, I hardly recognised you. They're after making a grand straight fellow out of you. You'd better stop growing up now and start growing out for a change."

As I watched him lumbering into the old tub-trap I said, "You're after getting a bit on the heavy side yourself, Uncle Gerry!"

"'Tis the old heart!" he said, flicking up the pony who had also got so fat that he had rubbed the paint off the insides of the shafts. "Doctor Normoyle took me off the whisky and put me on to the stout and I'm getting right loguey on it. And, by the same token, a bottle of stout wouldn't do you any harm either. I suppose we may offer you one now and again?"

"The student's drink!" I laughed. "All we can afford!"

As the old pony trotted along the road I asked after my aunt, and Marky, and Nancy, and the farm, but what I wanted to get on to as quickly as I decently could was whether he had any tips for the July races.

It was not until I was unpacking and came on my father's usual presents for Marky and Nancy that I thought of Noreen, and remembered that she had got married a few months back; for there were two Italian blouses this time, one white blouse for Nancy, and one pale blue marked *For Noreen* which I took to be a wedding-token.

I found Nancy in the kitchen, and I could see no great change in her, apart from a few grey streaks of hair; and that she was getting "right loguey" too. She shouted with delight when she saw me, "Aha! You're not a child any more! God be with the days when I used to throw you up to the ceiling. But I'm going to kiss you all the same."

And we kissed with double-hearty smacks and laughs. Then I handed over the two blouses with a mock bow.

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" With my papa's compliments, madame! "

" They're gorgeous! " she said, laying the two of them side by side. The arm of the blue fell on the arm of the white. Gently she lifted the blue sleeve and let it sink on its own blouse. " I'll post it to her. You heard she went off from me in the heel of the hunt? Aye! She fell in with a soldier here in the barracks and she followed him to London.

" It wouldn't surprise me to hear one of these days that his regiment was posted overseas, to India or Africa or Egypt. Then she'll be gone from me entirely."

She smiled, but it was a sad smile.

" I'm sorry, Nancy. You'll surely miss her."

Her smile went. She said vehemently, " I will not! There was a time when I'd have laid down my life for that girl. I don't care no more about her now than the child unborn." She smiled sadly again. " Ye used to be great pals at one time."

" Yes," I agreed shortly, and I was glad to turn round and see Marky darkening the doorway.

We greeted one another warmly. I handed him the sailor's twist. As we were flattering one another I wondered if I was expected to make the old joke about his getting married to Nancy, but that year I was in love with a girl at the university and he looked so grey and wizened and she looked so fat that the joke seemed rather stale and even a little unseemly. I got him to talk about the July races, because my uncle had said that he was interested in a horse called Flyaway, and he started to tell me all about it.

Suddenly, as we talked, there was a noise behind us like a clatter of pigeons rising. It was Nancy rending the blue blouse from top to bottom, tearing at it savagely again and again, her teeth bared, her eyes out on pins.

Marky, undeflected, merely glanced at her and went on talking in his slow steady voice about Flyaway. We heard the bang of the range-lid. I got the smell of burning silk. Marky, seeing that I was too dazed to listen, took me by the arm and, still talking about the horse, guided me out into the hot sun of the cobbled yard. I looked back at the kitchen door.

" Never heed her," he said. " She's upset this long time. She feels very lonely in herself."

" Marky! Did Noreen get into trouble or something? "

" No! She just hoisted her sails, and off with her. It was just as well! Seeing her going off there every night with soldiers and common fellows around the town, and poor Nancy alone in that kitchen sitting looking at the fire in the range . . ."

" Wasn't it a pity yourself and Nancy didn't make a match of it? "

He looked at me from under his grey eyebrows and said quietly, " And give it to say to everyone that I had another man's child under my roof? "

The news did not surprise me. I had guessed it for some time.

" But what matter? " I cried. " What matter? "

He shook his little bullet head slowly and slowly pronounced

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judgment. " It does matter. I heard it said too often that no man nor beast ever loved their young with the fierce love of a woman for her by-child." He tapped me lightly on the arm with the twist-tobacco. " If I was you I'd put ten shillings on Flyaway," and he went about his affairs.

As I stood there a bugle began to unfold its far-carrying notes from the distant barracks. Its elaborate call fainted on the changing wind and died away. Did I hear the sparrows chirruping in the walled orchard? Did the ivy rustle? Did I smell decaying vegetation? It was the same evening hour. The soldiers would soon be coming out to meet their girls.

The natural way back into the house was through the kitchen.

Nancy was standing by the range, with the poker in her fist and her hooped back to the door. I knew she had heard the lifted latch, but she held her rounded back rigidly against me. I waited.

She turned, looked at me, and said coldly, " Well? What do you want now? "

I made a feeble gesture with my hands, a sort of half shrug that said, " Poor Nancy! " Then I walked off to another part of the house. I wanted badly to read about Flyaway.

All that happened over forty years ago. I have three children of my own now. One is fourteen, one is nearly sixteen, and the eldest is a few months over eighteen. The middle one is my son, and when I happened to look at him the other night across the fire I saw what I felt to be a familiar look in his eyes and all this came back to me. After all, I have now come to the age when memories are meaningful —the age when a man knows that he has lived.

The farm has descended to a second cousin and my family goes down there now and again for a holiday. They tell me that the cottage on the Curragh has completely disappeared, knocked down to make room for a car-park. When I talk to them about bugle-calls they laugh at me and say, " Daddy! Buglers, and drummer-boys, and gun-wagons, and all that sort of thing belong to the time of the Boer War."

They say you cannot see the lights of the Camp any more because the spruce and firs that have been planted there as a shelter-belt hide them. But I could always go to the Curragh for the races.

Neither trained horses nor wild horses would drag me down there now. The only thing that would tempt me there would be the night, and I daren't do it. I would see the flickering lights across the plain. I'd hear the wavering sound of a far-off bugle. And I would know that these things that I could neither see nor hear are the only reality. It is the truth. I am too old to embrace it now.

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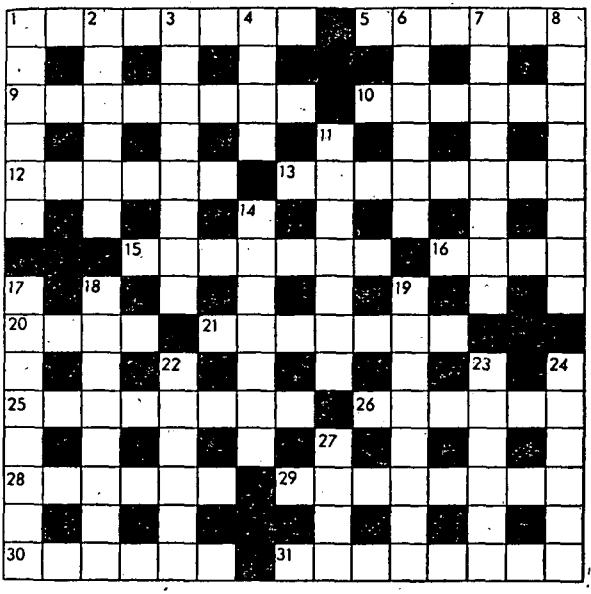
ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

★

Solution on Page 90

★



CLUES

Across

1 Late warmth in photo finish (4, 4).

5 Nearly exact summary (6).

9 Din keeps becoming superficial (4-4).

10 Under fifty mixed produces a yell (6).

12 Logic about a child (6).

13 Musical term—or couturier's curse? (8).

15 Horizon's in a pesky lineament (7).

16 All Wight, perhaps (4).

20 Home or golden (4).

21 Total absence of mind? (7).

25 This boy's been called up (8).

26 S-boat? No, rough draft (6).

28 Delay may have legal intent (6).

29 Clarissa's cad, or Althea's bard (8).

30 Weapon plurally looked or drawn (6).

31 She ain't what she used to be (4, 4).

Down

1 Craving of French papa (6).

2 One of Eliab's sons (6).

3 Fish owned harbours (8).

4 An efficient-sounding victim of fratricide (4).

6 Smoking jacket? No, dope! (6).

7 Total breakdown of soap cell (8).

8 Did surgeon have nightmare? (8).

11 Like stamps, or cavalry (7).

14 Lead-swinger? Hardly (7).

17 Royal Marines bulged and groused (8).

18 Rattling good tribe ruler? (8).

19 Dickensian type with metallic ring (8).

22 Wise sister of Apollo (6).

23 A tart's in geological layers (6).

24 Moony maiden makes bee hop (6).

27 S. African goose challenger? (4).

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